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SQUARE  
MYSTERY

BY  
M. L. EADES

*The Torrington Mystery*  
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THE TORRINGTON SQUARE  
MYSTERY



# The Torrington Square Mystery

## CHAPTER I

### IN THE PALM-COURT

**Q**UEEN'S PARK HOTEL was ablaze with light and from the ball-room blared the syncopated music of a jazz band. A mail-boat was in port, and on such an occasion the hotel management put forth its best endeavours for the entertainment of the guests. There were many dancers here to-night. There were fair girls from home, who, despite the tropical climate of Trinidad, had retained much of their fresh English beauty. There were girls of the country too, attractive also, many of them, with their warmer tints and soft, dark eyes. Like a garden of flowers was this galaxy of beautiful maidens in their shimmering silks and satins of all colours of the rainbow as they tripped hither and thither like flowers swaying in the wind.

The night was hot ; breathless ; but the heat had no deterrent effect upon the dancers.

Pretty feet in dainty slippers twinkled in and out in the crazy movements of the Charleston, and the hum of disjointed conversation, light badinage and laughter, intermingled with the strains of the band.

The music ceased. Many of the dancers wandered out into the soft, tropical night ; a night of stars, and glamour, and faint, sweet scents.

" Shall we go into the palm-court ? " suggested Hawtry Le Page to his partner. " It might be a bit cooler there. This place is as hot as——"

" Please do not say it," said his companion, with a light laugh. " It would be pleasant to hear something original for a change."

Le Page's shrug of his powerful shoulders had something foreign about it ; there was a suggestion of this also in his manner as he bowed her to a low seat sheltered from view by the sweeping fronds of a large palm.

" You are one of the fortunate ones of the earth," he remarked, seating himself beside her. " You do not feel the heat."

" Is that so ? "

The girl's tone held a hint of amusement. He threw her a quick glance.

" You always convey that impression," he replied. " You always seem so cool—in every way."

" I fear it must be one of my idiosyncrasies," she said carelessly. " We all have some failing or other."



A shade of irritation swept over the man's handsome, sallow face. Sometimes he felt as though he would like to give Clare a good shaking. Would she lose her sang-froid for once, he wondered.

He beckoned to a servant.

"What shall it be, Clare?—A short one?"

"No, thank you. I prefer a plain squash, if I may."

Le Page gave the order—a squash for his companion, and a whisky and soda for himself—while Clare, opening her vanity bag and taking therefrom a powder-puff, flicked it gently across her face.

Le Page watched her with quiet amusement. He was thinking how graceful were all Clare Ashleigh's movements. Other girls powdered and rouged and lipsticked in public, but there was nothing admirable in the proceeding as a rule. When Clare flicked a powder-puff—she used neither rouge nor lipstick—there was no business aspect to it. It was merely a pretty feminine conceit; but it was a conceit that gave pleasure to the beholder.

The "boy" returned with the drinks. Clare put away her puff and accepted a cigarette from her companion.

Some people considered Hawtry Le Page a handsome man. His admirers were chiefly women. His father had been an Englishman; his mother a beautiful Italian with the temper of a fiend. He had inherited his father's



proportions ; but he had inherited his mother's temper and her Southern colouring. His sardonic smile was his own. His slightly American accent had been acquired during several visits to New York.

As Clare blew little clouds of smoke into the air the dark eyes of her companion were turned appreciatively upon her, noting the small face with its clear-cut features ; the smooth skin delicate as the petals of a flower.

Clare Ashleigh belonged to the army of post-war girls, so many of whom looked as if they were formed in the same mould and turned out by the thousand. But Clare possessed distinction. Though tall, straight and slender as a sapling, shingled, and with a fashionable silhouette, she was not one of the thousand. Rather was she a piece of fine workmanship, classically finished in every detail from her cane-coloured hair, smooth and sleek as satin, to her tapering finger-tips. As Hawtry Le Page was thinking, "A girl any man would be proud to take about." But he found her proud and vastly cold. However, he liked her pride, which was wholly untinctured by arrogance, and was a beautiful thing in Clare. Her coldness, which was appropriate and seemly in her relationships with others, was distinctly mortifying when manifested towards himself. Though they were on a friendly footing he had never been able to break down the reserve behind which she

entrenched herself, and approach to intimate terms.

"There's the band," exclaimed Clare as the plangent waves of sound pealed forth again, and there was a general exodus of other couples from the palm-court.

"Let us sit this out, Clare, shall we?—Or would you rather dance?"

"Sit it out by all means. It is very pleasant here. I suppose," she added thoughtfully, "I shall not have much dancing when I live in my 'little back room in Bloomsbury.'"

"Bloomsbury!" he echoed in amazement. "Whatever put Bloomsbury into your head?"

"Why not? I shall be living there before long."

She leaned back in her chair and gazed at him reflectively. But her mind was not on Hawtry Le Page. She was thinking of the mystery enveiling this journey to England. Why was it necessary for her to go there, and why was she left so completely in the dark about it?

At her quietly spoken words dismay sudden and swift had taken possession of Le Page. But in a moment he had recovered himself. He laughed.

"You gave me a nasty jolt that time, Clare. For the moment I thought you were in earnest."

"I am in earnest. I am leaving by the outgoing mail."



Le Page straightened up in his chair as though jerked by a wire. His face had gone white.

"You can't mean it?" he exclaimed, aghast. His fingers were gripping hard on the arms of his chair.

"Booking my passage is a *fait accompli*; my arrangements are made, and I am ready to step on board," she returned calmly.

"But—but why?" he exclaimed. "You have no friends in England—that is—I believe you said——" He broke off, giving her a quick, searching glance as a sudden unpleasant thought struck him.

"No. I have no friends there. But London is the place for criminals, professionals, and impecunious young women."

"That does not apply to you anyway."

"No?" she echoed in some amusement. "I have the munificent income of £175 per annum, which does not go far in Trinidad. To augment this princely sum I intend taking a room in Bloomsbury—the correct place for impecunious young persons, I believe—and getting some work to do."

"Work! You!" he protested hotly. "A bit of a girl like you—brought up as you have been. How absurd! You can't do it."

"Can I not?" Her smile was gentle, exclusive. It tantalised and exasperated him. He felt that she both could and would; that

his protestations were as thistledown borne on the breeze. "I have health," she went on composedly. "That is an asset of importance. Youth—another asset. Is not this the day of the 'Happy young things?'"—There was a nuance of mischief in her tone now; but it called forth no response from Le Page.

He made an impatient movement.

"Asset! Not on your life—you're mad, Clare."

"I think I can lay claim to a normal supply of grey matter," she continued—the mischief was more in evidence now as she looked at him through her long brown lashes. "Besides, I am just longing to see England. I want to go out into the world to see life for myself; to go to London; the centre of all things; the city of dreams; of adventure——"

Le Page broke in with savage impatience.

"Dreams!" he scoffed. "You talk like a child—as a mad woman. And adventures—You are likely to meet with more adventures than you desire."

"Oh, how stupid!—I should love it."

"I'm not stupid. I'm talking truth, Clare—real, solid truth. You are far too young and beautiful to be knocking about alone, in London of all places. But, Clare," he said softly, his whole manner changing as he leaned forward and put his hand on hers where it rested on her knee, "you need not go alone, dear. Marry me and let me take you to



London. No, Clare"—as she made to rise—"you must listen to me. I cannot let you go. I love you, little girl—You knew it, didn't you? I've only been waiting for an opportunity to tell you."

But Clare drew away from him.

"Oh, please, please do not say any more," she begged earnestly. "I'm very sorry. I really did not know. I had no idea you thought of me in that way."

But at the thought of losing her his control went completely. He caught her roughly to him; his face bent to hers; and his words came fast like a torrent. Their burden was his love for her—that he could not live without her. The Italian in him was uppermost now, and he spoke with all the impassioned fervour of his Southern nature. Wild, extravagant things he said, his tones now soft and pleading, now rough with the stress of emotion. His whole manner betrayed a terrible earnestness, the anxiety of one almost beside himself in his eagerness to obtain his desire. But his vehemence and extravagance grated on the girl's sensibilities and displeased her. The Le Page she had known hitherto was the cultured man of the world; of a sardonic humour, perhaps; but poised; inclining to a frugality in speech. This man of uncontrollable emotions, of wild, immoderate speech, was a revelation to her, and her reactions were unpleasant and inimical to him.

She tried to push him from her, to free herself ; but he held her, showering kisses upon her hands.

“ Clare, I’ll not let you go until you promise to marry me.”

“ But I don’t want to marry you—I’m not going to marry you,” she broke in resentfully. She hated the feel of his hot lips upon her hands ; his hot breath—somehow like those cacophonous sounds blaring from the ball-room ; crude ; horrible ; indecent. She would always hate jazz now.

“ Let me go,” she said sharply. “ How ridiculous we would look to anyone coming in here.”

He gave an impatient exclamation, but he freed her.

“ Forgive me . . . I ought not . . . I was led away . . . I’m sorry. But you will think it over, Clare ? You will wait for the next boat ? ”

But Clare was still feeling aggrieved.

“ If I waited for a hundred boats my answer would still be the same. I do not care for you in that way.”

“ Yet we have been such good pals. Surely you must care for me a little.”

“ As a dancing-partner, a pleasant companion, yes,” she replied coldly. “ But nothing more. I am sorry,” she continued in a softer tone. “ Truly I am. But it would be unkind to raise false hopes when nothing could come of them.”



He made a wrathful movement. His hands were clenched as though he were putting great restraint upon himself, and Clare, looking at him, saw the furious anger in his eyes. She was startled.

The music ceased and people began to wander into the palm-court. Clare took the opportunity to escape.

As her slender figure disappeared from view, Hawtry Le Page flung himself down again upon the seat under the palms. He lit a cigarette, throwing the match aside irritably.

He was angry; angry beyond measure; he had failed in what he had set out to do. His mind went back over the last few months, from the beginning of his acquaintance with Clare Ashleigh. He had secured an introduction within a few days of his arrival in Port of Spain; but she had held aloof; it had been no easy matter to win her friendship. It was their mutual love of dancing that had finally brought them together. Both were exceptionally good dancers, and Clare admitted to herself that she had never known what a pleasure dancing could be until she danced with Hawtry Le Page. But though they had become fairly good friends—even pals, in a measure, Le Page had never been able to introduce a more tender intimacy into their friendship. Still he had cherished the hope that this was merely a matter of time. Now this hope was ruthlessly shattered—Clare was going away.

What did this sudden journey to England mean, he wondered. Was there anything behind it? Her reasons were plausible enough; but he did not believe them. Of course £175 would not go far in Trinidad—or anywhere else for that matter—but, although she was living with the Willingtons, the house they occupied belonged to Clare and they must have some sort of financial arrangement between them. The Willingtons were nice people and Clare was fond of them. Moreover she had a large circle of friends. What then was the true explanation of this sudden departure to a strange country far away from everyone she knew? And to live in Bloomsbury! *Bloomsbury*!—His disgust almost took on audibility. There was an explanation naturally; but it was not the one she had given him—he was convinced of that. Then what was it? Had—she—heard—anything?

At that thought he straightened up and his brow darkened. How was it that he had messed things up like this? he asked himself irritably. He had never dreamed of failure. Of course Clare was not just the ordinary type of girl—easily won; that was what made her so desirable.

He sat on under the palm unconscious of the passing of time, smoking cigarette after cigarette, thinking—planning—trying to find a way out. It was the strains of “God Save the King” that finally roused him from his meditations. He stood up, jabbed the end of

his cigarette into the ash-tray and prepared to depart.

So Clare had refused to marry him—so ran his thoughts ; and she was going to London. Well—all sorts of things happened in London. /



## CHAPTER II

### CLARE MEETS WARREN

ENGLAND was experiencing the discomforts of a heat-wave. There had been nothing like it for a number of years—so the papers said. In London it was particularly trying, and those fortunate people who were able to leave for the country or the seaside had done so. The less fortunate carried on, grumbling occasionally, but for the most part taking it philosophically. The trees and shrubs in the gardens and squares wore a dejected, dusty appearance, and front doors stood wide open to let in what little air there was to houses stuffy and unpleasant with the abnormal weather.

It had been a disagreeable day, oppressive, with occasional puffs of hot, dust-laden wind that were trying to both temper and nerves. The evening brought no respite. It was close and very still. But Clare Ashleigh, walking slowly down Torrington Square, had no thoughts to spare for weather conditions. She found other subjects far more engrossing. For one thing life in London was not shaping according to expectations.

London almost bewildered her with its magnitude ; its teeming multitudes of people ; its traffic ; its life ; its never-ceasing movement. It was a marvellous place ! Magnificent ! It far exceeded any previous conception she had had of it. Every part of her being thrilled to its wonderful fascination. But it was cruel ; cruel in its very vastness and aloofness—aloof and cold as the snow-crowned peaks of inaccessible mountains. Here she saw humanity in flux ; but humanity remote as the stars on a frosty night. Clare felt that she had neither part nor lot with these hosts of people who looked at you but never saw you. She was mere flotsam washed up upon the tide of this sea of people and of no more account than flotsam cast upon the seashore.

The fact was Clare was finding out that there is no place where a human being can be so lonely as in a great city ; it was this terrible loneliness which struck dismay to her heart. She had been in London now some weeks. She was as friendless to-day as on the day she landed. She who had been used to one long round of jazz and gaiety, who had always had as many friends as the honeysuckle has bees, found this intolerable loneliness prone to crush her spirit as the car of Juggernaut crushed its devotees.

But Clare refused to be crushed. Hers was the spirit of youth. To her life was a wonderful adventure. It was walking along a new road ;



one never knew what to expect. Sometimes the road would run straight for a mile or so with much to interest and delight the wayfarer : but it was certain to have a few dreary patches ; a few hills and rough places to be overcome. But there were corners to be turned on this road—many of them, and they were thrilling. One never knew what lay round the next corner. The thrill was in the uncertainty. You might draw a blank one time ; but the next—— ! Who knew what adventure might be awaiting one ?

Clare was thinking of the next corner when she arrived at Linden House, where she had two small rooms on the top floor. The front door—like most of the doors in the Square—stood wide open. No one was about ; the place had a dreary and deserted air, and the strange, enveloping silence which seemed to rush to meet her struck Clare with a feeling of unease, of calamity. She shivered with a sense of sudden chill. As she began slowly to ascend the stairs she felt very tired, though she had been unconscious of weariness until now. It must be the depressing effect of the house, she thought. It was too early to turn on the lights, but already shadows lurked in the corners of the hall where the back door was closed. The stairs creaked in places and the sound was startling in that quiet house.

Arriving at the top floor Clare opened the door of her sitting-room, then stood staring in sheer bewilderment.



The room was filled with light, for the setting sun shone in through the open window, from which the curtains were drawn aside, and, seated in her own special chair—quite as if he had a right to it—was a young man calmly reading a newspaper.

“Hullo!” he exclaimed, looking up at the opening of the door. Then as he saw Clare, he jumped up hastily.

“Say—er—— Do you want anybody?” he asked.

“Not at all, thank you: only my room,” replied Clare frigidly.

“*Your* room!—I do not understand.”

“Neither do I,” returned Clare. “But may I inquire what you are doing in my room?”

“Your room?” he reiterated, parrot-wise. “Oh, do come in, please, and sit down—this is a very comfortable chair. You are Fred’s sister, I suppose. But, sure, he might have told me. What must you think of me for taking possession like this?” And he smiled ingratiatingly.

“What I think does not seem to matter, does it?” asked Clare, wondering if she had to deal with a lunatic and wishing the house had not been so deserted as she came up. The man looked sane enough, rather pleasant, in fact; but——

“I would really like to know if you are a burglar or not?” she added, waving aside his urgent invitation to enter her own room. She

preferred to stand just within the doorway with her hand suggestively on the bell—the other hand was striving to retain hold of two or three parcels.

“A burglar! Gee whiz!”

The young man gasped. Then without warning he broke into a peal of laughter which, for some unknown reason, sounded strange in that silent house, while Clare regarded him in amazement. But her hand slid down from the bell, and she advanced one step into the room.

“Say, I’m sorry,” he apologised. “But a burglar! Do I look like one? I’ll write that to the Dad—he’ll be fair tickled to death. You sure put one over me that time. But you are Fred’s sister, are you not?”

“I’m nobody’s sister.”

“Oh!” he said blankly. “Seems I’ve made a mistake then—got into the wrong room perhaps?”

“That is obvious,” returned Clare uncompromisingly.

“I had better go then,” he suggested, his tone betraying no eagerness to do anything of the kind, while his eyes—“nice hazel eyes,” was Clare’s inward comment—rested with pleased interest on the cold young face confronting him.

“Undoubtedly,” she replied, standing aside to allow him to pass.

“But you will let me apologise and explain, will you not?” he begged. “I would sure



hate you to think, well—to regard me as a burglar, you know.”

His ingenuous air was disarming and a faint smile quivered round Clare’s lips.

“I do not think that burglars make themselves quite so comfortable,” she replied drily, with a suggestive glance at the newspaper he was still holding. “Maybe you had better explain,” and there was no mistake about her smile now, for she had decided that he was rather a pleasant young man.

His ready smile answered hers.

“Allow me to relieve you of your parcels first. Oh, say ! I’m most awfully sorry, I sure am,” and he sprang forward to retrieve a couple of the paper bags which had slipped from the security of her arm.

He was too late. There was a little crash, and three eggs lay in a nasty squash on the carpet, while some plums rolled maliciously in various directions.

“And that’s that !” murmured Clare looking with distaste at her carpet.

The young man gazed with dismay at his handiwork.

“It is all my fault,” he exclaimed with contrition—“keeping you standing there like that instead of clearing out. I’ll wipe it up,” and before Clare could stop him he was down on his knees wiping up the nasty mess with a fine white handkerchief.

“Oh, don’t use that,” she cried, then suddenly began to laugh helplessly, almost

hysterically. He was such an immaculate-looking young man ; his trousers were so beautifully and correctly creased, and to see him on his knees with his inefficient duster—!

“ Eh ? ” He looked up, his dripping handkerchief dangling from his hand. The next minute the two young things were laughing joyously together.

With his disengaged hand the young man drew forward a chair.

“ You’ll sit down while I finish this job ? ”

Clare put the rest of her parcels on the table and sat down ; she began to feel the need of support.

“ Say, this handkerchief is not equal to the job,” went on the young man disgustedly. “ Have you a duster or anything ? ”

Clare giggled with malicious enjoyment ; but she produced a duster out of the table drawer.

“ That will take up the worst of it. The maid can wash it up later.”

He accomplished his self-appointed task to the best of his ability.

“ Where shall I put these things ? ”

“ This will do,” pointing to the wastepaper basket under the table.

“ I—I guess I had better go now ? ” he observed regretfully.

Clare smiled.

“ What ! With your hands like that ? There is a water-tap and basin behind that book-case.”



"You sure are some girl," he said, with distinct approval, as he proceeded to wash his hands.

"You could scarcely go away with smashed eggs dripping from your fingers."

"Sure thing—I couldn't. But it was real kind of you to realise that."

"You have not told me yet how you came to be in my sitting-room," she reminded him.

"Neither I have. Well, it was this way. I'm an American, you know——"

"Not really!" murmured Clare, who was feeling ridiculously happy. It was delightful to have someone to speak to if only for a few minutes, someone of her own generation.

He grinned cheerfully.

"My American tongue sure gives me away every time. My Dad is interested in automobiles. The Van Elton cars—you know them?"

"Of course."

"Dad is *the* Elton of the Van Elton Automobile Company. He sent me over to this country to get them on the English market."

"But he did not send you to my sitting-room," objected Clare, with a humorous glance at the bright, eager face looking down upon her. He was so tall and good to look upon; so instinct with *joie de vivre* as he stood leaning with easy grace against the mantelshelf that she began to feel quite friendly towards him.

"Neither he did—I'm coming to that. I only arrived last week, you know. I'm stopping at the Russell—just near here, and was having a walk round when I met a friend from N' York. He was in some kind of a hurry; but he told me to go to his private hotel where he was staying. He said I would find the front door open. I was just to go upstairs to the top floor, open the door immediately opposite, and make myself comfortable until he returned—he was on his way to keep a business appointment. The seventh house he said it was, and I thought this was the place. The door was open so I came up, made myself comfortable according to instructions, waited for him and—you came."

"So I did," agreed Clare, who never dreamt of doubting his story.

"I apologise. I am most terribly sorry and all that—at least——"

"You do not seem the least bit sorry," Clare told him severely.

He laughed.

"That's so," he acknowledged readily and unashamed. "I'm real pleased to have become acquainted with you. I was feeling lonesome in this great city of yours. English people take a lot of knowing. They don't get friendly with strangers much, leastways not until they become wise about their family tree. Sure London is a real, lonesome place."



You have been rare kind though—like an American girl.”

“Thank you,” observed Clare, drily. “I happen to have come from Trinidad——”

“Say now, isn’t that interesting ! You are more American than English then—in point of position,” he added hurriedly. “We are really a kind of cousins.”

“O-oh ! You are generous anyway. But I cannot accept—er—relationships under false pretences. To begin with Trinidad is a British colony, and I am just as English as English parents and ancestors can make me.”

“That so ? Well I have some of them myself—English ancestors, I mean. But we can sure claim kinship, I take it.”

“You Americans are a little too swift,” objected Clare. “First you take possession of my room, then you claim cousinship with me.”

“Sure thing. We Americans recognise the goods when we see them.”

Clare froze instantly. She replied in a voice like ice.

“You are evidently given to making mistakes. I do not happen to be ‘the goods.’”

His hazel eyes fairly beamed into hers.

“There now—that is the English side of you talking. What I meant was that I think you are some girl and I would like to become a lot better acquainted with you—we might become real friends, don’t you think ? I am all right ; I sure am. I’m Warren P. Elton of

N' York City. Here is my card." He took out a card-case, extracted a card, and laid it on the table in front of her.

"Now, what do you say—shall we be friends?"

## CHAPTER III

### A COMPACT

CLARE hesitated. Her innate British reserve and her caution advised her to refuse overtures of friendship from a total stranger met under decidedly peculiar circumstances. But she was lonely, very lonely, and youth called to youth. Moreover she was strongly attracted to this alert, clean-cut young American whose eyes met hers so straightly and whose ready laugh was so infectious. And he was lonely too—"lonesome" was the term he used. Each needed the other's friendship, so why should she not accept his offer? Besides she had come to London seeking adventure—surely the prerogative of youth!—and here was adventure in the form of a presentable young man awaiting her on her very threshold. What she had sought was hers to take.

Hawtry Le Page had said that she was likely to meet with more adventures than she would desire. His words came back to her now and she frowned at their coming. She did not want to think of Le Page. He belonged to the past and all it stood for. Warren Elton



represented the present, and it was the present only with which she had to do now. The present was drab enough, but already he had brought colour and life. He was like a cold, bracing wind. Was she to refuse his friendship for the sake of a silly, old-fashioned scruple? Girls did what they pleased these post-war days. Had they not slain Mrs. Grundy and buried her deep down under a mountain of common sense and resolution? Was it for her, Clare Ashleigh, to resuscitate her?

Warren Elton did not hurry her. He just stood waiting while she made her decision, well content to let his eyes rest on the girl's pale, high-bred face as she sat, deep in thought, her elbow leaning on the table, her head, slightly tilted, supported by her hand. Clare had thrown aside her hat, and the light fell on her cane-coloured hair, beautifully shingled, and shining as satin does in the moonlight. Warren felt a strange thrill of pleasure as he gazed upon it, thinking how lovely it was, how its smoothness suited the well-poised and shapely head. She was like a lily, so he thought, a rare, white lily transplanted into uncongenial surroundings. Not that this sitting-room was of the usual bed-and-breakfast type of room. It had something of Clare's personality. While most of the furniture was characteristic of Bloomsbury private hotels and boarding-houses, its meanness was redeemed by a few good water-

colours, a Minty bookcase well stocked with books, and a number of valuable and choice *objets d'art* which were as alien to their surroundings as the girl herself. "Her own possessions, of course," was Elton's inward comment.

Clare had been looking out with unseeing eyes through the open window where the sky was tenderly flushed with evening tints. She turned and looked at him with a sweet seriousness.

He smiled down at her.

"Well? Will you put it there?" and he held out his hand.

His smile was reflected in her face as she placed her hand in his.

"I accept your friendship," she said simply.

He gave her hand a tight grip.

"Good!" he replied. "That's real fine. Now by what name do your best friends know you?"

"Clare Ashleigh."

"I like that. Clare suits you. It has a stately lavender-and-old-lace sound about it. I'm Warren to my best friends."

"I told you before that you Americans are far too rapid," she said demurely. It was curious to hear this stranger using her Christian name. But there was a thrill in it. It savoured of something unusual—this friendship, for instance—of gay adventure.

"Sure thing," Elton replied briskly. "Life is short. Now what shall we do to celebrate?"



"Celebrate?" she echoed.

"Sure. Let us go and dine somewhere. You haven't had your eats yet?"

"Eats?—Oh!" She laughed then. "No, not yet. I was just going to have some of the things in these parcels and a cup of tea."

"They will do for to-morrow. We must celebrate to-night."

"What about the friend you were going to see?"

"I'll see him to-morrow morning."

"But these things won't keep fresh," she still objected. "See—cream cakes; meat pies; salad and—oh, the plums are on the floor."

"Gee whiz! So they are. I forgot them in my misery over the eggs." And forthwith he groped about in pursuit of the plums which proved to be as elusive as the Pimpernel. "Let us save the lives of the cream cakes and things by eating them this evening," he said, as he put the plums on the table, "and to-morrow we shall dine out somewhere."

Clare's eyes opened wide and she laughed softly.

"My landlord will turn me out if I entertain young men in my room. 'This is a "respectable" place I would have you know.'"

"We shall shut this early Victorian person outside where he belongs," retorted Elton, promptly shutting the door. "I'll settle him for you." Clare quite believed it. "I'll tell



him I'm your cousin from America. Let me help you get supper."

When after a surfeit of loneliness and self-repression two modern young people get together restraint is apt to rebound like released elastic. It was so now. They were like children on holiday. For the first time in her young life Clare stepped daintily aside from her inherent reserve and met Warren half-way. In a spirit of good *camaraderie*, and with much light-hearted, but stifled, laughter—to avoid giving offence to the early Victorian ogre—these two young things set about preparing their meal.

"Say, this is real fine," observed Elton as they took their places opposite each other. "May I help you to a hot meat pie? Tastes good, doesn't it?—my cooking, of course. You sure have a cute little gas stove. What do you do with yourself all day, Clare?"

"Look for a job most mornings," she replied promptly. "The afternoons are devoted to recreation and forgetfulness of the events of the morning."

"A job!" Elton frowned. "What kind of a job?"

"Whatever offers," she replied, then laughed. "Listen. I have been in England about two months, and in that time I have had eight jobs and much experience."

"What kind of jobs, Clare?"

"What kind? All kinds. I tried the films

first—answered an advertisement for pupils, you know——”

“ *Films ! You !* ”

“ Yes ; I know. Two days finished that. Then I went as companion to an elderly woman. What she really wanted was a feminine dog-boy. It was a slobbering little beast too, with tearful eyes. The dog and I parted ‘ without prejudice.’ To view life from a different angle I became a manequin—one day finished that.” Her tone left no doubt as to her mind in that connection.

“ And then ? ”

“ Oh—er—various office jobs ”—her brows puckered into a frown—“ they didn’t suit,” she added slowly. Her manner changed. “ My last venture was as a seller of vacuum cleaners on a commission basis. But evidently my vocation does not lie in selling vacuum cleaners—nor anything else for that matter.”

“ And now—what ? ”

“ I am resting, as the theatrical profession puts it,” she returned, laughing gaily.

Elton joined in her laughter ; then of a sudden he became grave.

“ Say, Clare, we are real pals from now on, are we not ? ”

“ I believe so.”

“ You trust me, don’t you ? ”

She gave him a quick, searching glance.

“ I accepted your friendship,” she said.

“ Sure thing. That’s the point. As we are friends you won’t mind letting me help if



you're hard up at all. If you are out of a job——"

Clare's chilly expression caused him to break off abruptly and stare at her in consternation.

"Say," he gasped, "I guess I've stepped on your British pride, but I didn't mean to, honest to goodness I didn't. I just meant——"

"You thought I was a girl who accepted *money*"—the scorn with which the young lips said it—"from you, a man, a stranger——"

"No ; a pal," he put in quietly. "And that is a very different thing. Gee whiz !" and he heaved a tremendous sigh. "British pride is like a junk of granite if you come up against it. It can hurt some. Say, Clare, I'm rare sorry you misunderstood me. I thought you trusted me. You think that I meant to insult you when I just thought that London would be a cruel place for a young girl like you—out of a job, and perhaps getting short, and—er—worried. I wouldn't like you to be troubled any. Let's cut it out, shall we, Clare ? I want us to be real friends. You can trust me—honest to goodness you can."

She regarded him dubiously. His offer had shocked her, and she was painfully conscious of the peculiar circumstances of their meeting and of her informal acceptance of his, a stranger's, friendship. But he seemed sincere, his voice rang true.

"You won't offer to help me again ?"



"No fear, Baby. I'll not risk metamorphosing my pal into a Class A British refrigerator."

He offered his cigarette case, and the little breeze that might have so easily ended their acquaintance died away. While they smoked they planned to dine together at the Trocadero the next evening.

"I pay my share—you understand that?" said Clare.

"But I invited you."

"Then I do not go."

"Whew! You are touchy, aren't you? Don't English girls allow their men friends the honour of entertaining them occasionally?"

"I am not discussing what other girls do or don't do," she said shortly. "It will be very jolly to have a pal to go about with providing I pay my share."

"I get you. I'll agree, too, on one condition. I have been your guest to-night; you be my guest to-morrow, after that we share—right?"

He leaned across the small table dividing them and his laughing eyes gazed into Clare's with a whimsical expression.

A faint colour tinged her pale cheek.

"So be it," she laughed.

"Done. Now I must get along."

He sprang up. Clare thought that she had never seen such an embodiment of energy. It seemed to radiate from him.

"See," she said. "You have broken your cuff-link."

"So I have—must have dropped it somewhere around."

He searched about, Clare assisting, but the broken part remained hidden.

"It doesn't matter," he said indifferently, not knowing that it was going to prove a link of evidence in the Torrington Square Mystery.

## CHAPTER IV

### PANIC

CLARE washed up the tea things and put them away in a small cupboard. This cupboard when covered with a silken cloth and with a bowl of flowers on top did not readily reveal its utilitarian nature. When one lived in two small rooms such stratagems had to be resorted to.

Standing in front of her open window Clare gazed meditatively down upon the garden of the Square. Not that she really saw the trees veiled with London's dust, nor the two or three persons occupying the garden seats. She was seeing again the laughter-filled eyes of Warren Elton as they had looked at her across the table. They were kind, those hazel eyes. And they looked at one so straightly. Of course she had done an unprecedented thing in accepting his friendship and allowing him to remain on like that ; he might be a burglar or confidence man—she had heard that London was full of confidence men ; or he might be, well, just anything. Wise people would say that she was asking for trouble. Let them ! She was glad she had not been



wise. She believed in Warren, and she felt thrilled and exhilarated with the romance and the joyous adventure of it. She was no longer a lone girl in a great city. She had a friend—a pal. That must explain her communicativeness to-night, telling Warren her experiences like a garrulous old lady, talking about her private affairs. She had surprised herself. But he had not seemed to her as a stranger, rather as someone that she had known for a long time. And they had been happy, very happy; and this evening was but the precursor of others to come. There were so many places she wanted to go to; but sightseeing all alone had been dreary work—no one to discuss things with. Now she and Warren could see London together. What a time they would have! There would be joy, and laughter, and much talking—they had found so much to say to each other to-night. At the remembrance of it Clare laughed aloud, a ripple of laughter, then stopped suddenly.

For some unknown reason her laugh had sounded incongruous, out of place. It was just as if she had laughed in church, or at a graveside. That was absurd, of course; a far-fetched idea. The fact was Warren had so filled the room with life that his departure left an unusual emptiness. That was it. And yet——

That was the strangeness of it; she felt as though some other presence were in the room with her. She looked over her shoulder. No

one was there, and the door leading to the landing was shut as Warren had left it. But the room was collecting shadows and there was something eerie about it, something she had never noticed before though she had often sat there in the soft dusk enjoying the peace and quiet of it. She had rather liked her attic rooms. There was a comfortable feeling of seclusion living up there amongst the sparrows. But to-night——

Perhaps she was developing nerves. She recalled now her feeling of depression on entering the house that evening, the peculiar silence and its effect upon her. Strange that, for she was not given to megrims and depression of spirits. It savoured of hysteria, and Clare had a healthy girl's contempt for hysteria. She turned from the window with a determined air. She would light the gas—Linden House did not aspire to electricity—and read for a little while before going to bed.

How long Clare had been reading she had no idea. Her book was interesting and she had become absorbed in it. All at once she raised her eyes and looked round expectantly. Again she experienced the sensation of another presence close to her. But she was alone.

For a moment she sat, thoughtful, her elbow resting on the arm of her chair, her chin in her cupped hand. What was the matter with her? She had never had nerves in her life.

Where she sat she faced the door leading to



her bedroom. Clare had not observed it particularly before, but now she noticed that the door was slightly ajar.

"That's strange," she murmured, reflectively. "I know that I shut that door before I went out." She had not entered her bedroom since coming home. Her hat, gloves and bag still lay upon a chair, where she had put them when she laid the table. What a long time ago it seemed !

A small clock on her desk began to strike the hour. It was nine o'clock.

She got up resolutely from her chair. She never had given way to nerves ; she was not going to begin now. She might just as well take her things into the other room and put them away. But first she would put on the light and dispel shadows and fears together.

Pushing open the bedroom door she lighted a match. She had to cross the room to reach the gas bracket. The match went out and she struck another ; but she was trembling now, trembling with sheer fright of some unseen and wholly intangible presence.

The gas lighted she peered about for the cause of her fear. Everything was as it should be. She had been an idiot, that was all. Then it was she noticed that the screen in front of the basin was out of place. The maid must have moved it and forgotten to put it back ; but it was very unlike Annie to come upstairs after she had once done up the room in the morning.



Clare went over to put the screen in place. There was some obstruction behind which prevented her doing this, so she pulled one leaf forward to see what it was. The next instant a long, piercing shriek rang through the silent house.

## CHAPTER V

### MURDER !

**T**HERE came the sound of doors being opened hurriedly and footsteps racing up the stairs. Clare, rushing headlong from that *thing* which she had seen, almost fell into the arms of James Scott, the proprietor of Linden House.

"Whatever's the matter?—What is it?" he demanded sharply, keeping a steady hold upon her arm.

"There's—there's a dead man in my room," she gasped.

Someone screamed.

"A *what*!" exclaimed the proprietor, his gaze wandering confusedly to the woman who screamed and back to Clare. "What do you mean?—Are you crazy?"

"He's been—been murdered—I—I think," stammered Clare, grasping the stair-rail for support.

A screech, cut short, and a gasp of horror came from the group of lodgers gathered on the stairs.

For the space of a moment the proprietor

stared at Clare as though she were mad. Then :

“Come,” he said to the two men standing nearest him.

Those left behind drew closer together, one or two gazed upstairs in a scared way, the others sought to question Clare.

“Oh, *don't* !” she shuddered. “It's—it's *horrible* !”

They desisted, but stared at her curiously while they awaited the return of the others.

Clare felt an almost irresistible desire to scream, to do anything to distract that impersonal gaze away from her.

After a few minutes the men came down again. Their grave faces were quite sufficient to give confirmation to Clare's words.

“I am going to ring up for the police,” said Scott, “and until they come, no one must leave the house. I have locked your rooms, Miss Ashleigh”—with a peculiar, dubious look at Clare—“you had better go down to the sitting-room for the present.”

The other boarders began to regard Clare with suspicion. One by one they withdrew from her vicinity, grouping again on the next landing, talking excitedly. Scraps of their conversation came up to Clare where she still stood, alone, half dazed with shock, gripping the banister, for her knees were trembling beneath her.

“In her room. . . . Dreadful ! . . . Who is she ? . . . Poor kid ! . . . Pretty rough



on her. . . . You never know with that kind of . . . comes of taking in people without references. . . . Leave her alone, of course . . . doesn't do to get mixed up in this kind of thing. . . . Thought there was something queer. . . . Will the police arrest her? . . . Fine-looking girl. Don't believe she had anything to do with it. . . . Of course she did. . . . She's in it anyway . . . in her room . . . mustn't get mixed up. . . ."

Clare was so overwhelmed with horror and shock that at first these indiscreet remarks fell on uncomprehending ears, but gradually it was borne in upon her consciousness that she was the subject of conversation, that their words were directed against her. For a moment she was bewildered. The pitiless brutality of it staggered her. She supposed they did not dream that she could hear; but it seemed incredible that, without one word of justification, those people could so glibly pass judgment upon her, connect her, a young girl, with murder. It was horrible. Because this murder had been committed in her room she must be avoided lest they become involved. "Leave her alone . . . doesn't do to get mixed up." It was the mob spirit—the beast in man—to trample on the wounded.

An icy anger took possession of Clare, anger such as she had never hitherto experienced. It stiffened her pride and helped her to pull herself together as nothing else could have done.

With lips tight set and head held high she came down to where they stood discussing her and the murder, blocking up the landing and her passage downstairs.

"Please allow me to pass," she said quietly. "Thank you," and her glance swept them in proud disdain.

A door on the landing opened and someone came out and put a motherly arm about her.

"Come in here with me, my dear."

At the touch and the tone of that voice, so rich in human sympathy, Clare's hard-won self-control nearly gave way. She looked into a face of rare sweetness and strength, the face of a woman in her fifties, in whose eyes as they rested on the girl's strained, white face, lay a depth of tenderness and compassion that moved Clare profoundly. She felt abashed and humiliated, for she had seen Miss Johnstone on one or two occasions, but, because she had passed her youth, had deemed her a humdrum and uninteresting old maid. She who had been quick to resent the hasty judgment of herself had, in her young arrogance, dared to think disparagingly of this woman of wide sympathies and understanding. She followed her meekly into her room without a word, and Miss Johnstone shut the door, shutting out the curious—in some cases shamefaced—glances of the other boarders.

"Just rest on that couch and put your feet up, or would you prefer this chair?—the



chair?—that's right. Try not to think about it all, though I fear that's impossible advice."

Impossible advice indeed with the memory of that stark figure before her eyes and her mind thrusting back and forth from *it*, the victim, to Warren Elton, the slayer. Not for one moment had she doubted Elton's guilt. No other hypothesis was possible. Had she not found him, a perfect stranger, in her room, with the murdered man even then lying hidden behind the screen? She had returned before he could get away, of course, and, on the spur of the moment, he had concocted that story of having entered the wrong house. It was plausible, and she had not questioned its truth at the time; now in the light of what had subsequently transpired, it seemed but a flimsy fabrication. She marvelled at her credulity. The American's bright, attractive personality had hypnotised her as he had intended it should. And she had given her hand in friendship—to him—a—Clare shuddered. She felt cold and sick, physically sick with the revulsion of feeling.

Miss Johnstone, who had been busying herself at her cupboard, now came to her. She had a glass in her hand.

"Drink this," she said. "It will do you good."

Clare looked up. She simply could not take anything.

"Drink it, child. You need it badly."

And because she felt it would be churlish



to refuse, she did so, and felt much better in consequence.

"You are very good to me, a stranger, Miss Johnstone," she said, a little wistfully, "and, for all you know, I might be a——"

"An angel unawares," put in Miss Johnstone with a smile. "I only wish I knew how to help you, child. I will make up a bed on this couch for to-night at any rate. You ought not to be alone after receiving such a shock."

"Thank you—I will be very glad to be here."

Miss Johnstone went to her desk and began writing while Clare's thoughts immediately swung back to Warren Elton and the part he had played that evening. How could she have been so credulous? She had been like a child believing everything he told her. And yet who would have dreamt of doubting that fine, open face, open as daylight, those honest eyes that met one so straightly. Then Clare gave a little gasp. Whither were her thoughts tending. "Those honest eyes"! Well—they were too. And if so—For the first time a doubt of his guilt assailed her. Those laughter-filled, honest eyes were not the eyes of a shedder of blood. Surely no one who had just committed a horrible murder could be so full of the joy of life. Impossible! Besides had he not been innocent would he have dared delay his departure like that, risking discovery at any moment? And now Clare's mind swung

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to the other extreme. She heaped one reason upon another to establish his innocence, wondering how she could have deemed him guilty even for a moment. Her relief was immeasurable.

There came a peremptory knock at the door. Detective Inspector Mason wanted to see Miss Ashleigh upstairs. /

## CHAPTER VI

### WHO IS THE MAN ?

A POLICE CONSTABLE threw open her sitting-room door. As Clare entered three pairs of keen eyes were turned upon her in close scrutiny, eyes that bored through her and missed nothing. So Clare felt. They seemed to fill her little room, these men, and to lend it an atmosphere heavy with the dignity of the Law. Divisional Detective Inspector Mason, a huge, heavily built man, who was in charge of the case, motioned Clare to a chair near the table, where the light fell upon her face, seating himself on the other side immediately facing her. The Divisional Sergeant, and Winston Barrows—late of Scotland Yard but now practising on his own—sat near the window.

“Now, Miss Ashleigh,” began Mason in a brusque, official manner that Clare resented, “there is nothing to be nervous about ; we just want you to tell us, please, what you know of this murder.”

“I don’t know anything,” she replied. “When I went into my bedroom to put away



my things I noticed that the screen was out of place and tried to put it right. I was unable to do this owing to some obstruction at the back. I looked to see what it was and saw—a—a body—of a man. I did not expect to see anything like—like that—and screamed and ran out of the room.”

“What did you expect to see?”

“I scarcely know—something left there by the maid.”

“Humph! What time was this?”

“A little while ago—when I ran downstairs.”

“You say the screen had been moved, Miss Ashleigh—was it in another part of the room?”

“No; but it was much further out than I generally keep it.”

Mason heaved his big bulk into a more comfortable position and rested his arms upon the table.

“Miss Ashleigh, you went into the bedroom to put away your things—had you been out?”

“I was out all the afternoon,” returned Clare.

“Afternoon?” Mason frowned. Mason was beetle-browed. When he frowned the result was surprising. “Where were you this afternoon?” he wanted to know.

“I went to the Marble Arch Pavilion.”

“I see. And did you come straight home directly the show was over?”

"No," said Clare. "I had tea in the restaurant first. Afterwards I did some shopping."

"Quite so. Perhaps you bought some plums?"

Clare's eyes opened wide. "How did you know?" she asked.

The inspector merely shrugged his big shoulders by way of reply. Then he leaned back and took something from a small table.

"Do you see what is on this?" he asked, looking at her intently as he held up a plum.

Clare was beginning to feel bewildered. What had plums to do with the matter in hand?

"No," she replied—"unless it is dusty," she added. "I let them fall—and some eggs."

"Ah! Where was that?" he asked quickly.

"Just near the door. My parcels slipped."

Mason replaced the plum on the small table, then turned again to Clare.

"What time was it when you returned, Miss Ashleigh?" he asked.

"Somewhere about six o'clock, I should think," she replied without any hesitation.

Mason leaned back in his chair and for a moment or two tapped thoughtfully on his note-book with the end of his pencil. The action irritated the girl, whose nerves were on edge. She was feeling resentful at being mixed up in a case like this, or any other case for



that matter. Why should a man be murdered in her room of all places?

The inspector looked up suddenly.

"Did you go out again, Miss Ashleigh?" he asked.

Clare jerked her thoughts back. "No," she said. "I have been in ever since."

Mason took out his watch, looked at it, then at Clare. There was a deliberateness about his manner that reminded the girl of someone setting a trap.

"It is now 9.40," he said slowly. "What did you do between 6 o'clock and 9?"

The vision of a bright, eager face framed in crisp, curling black hair flashed before Clare's mind, and a faint colour tinged her pale cheeks, a fact which did not escape the keen eyes that watched her every change of expression.

"I had my supper and cleared away the things, then read for a little while," she replied in as casual a tone as she could muster.

"Who was with you, Miss Ashleigh?"

Mason had leaned forward half over the table and literally shot the question at her, and Clare flinched. There was no hint of colour in her face now. She was as white as milk.

"No one," she said in a low voice. But Clare did not make a good liar.

"Think again," said Mason tersely. His manner had suddenly hardened.

This and his evident unbelief roused all the



obstinacy in Clare's nature. She would *not* speak of Warren. If she did this detective with the hard, badgering manner would immediately accuse him of the crime—had she not herself done so? No, she would not have Warren dragged into this horrible affair.

"There is no need to think again, Inspector," she told him calmly.

"Huh!" he said harshly. Then he whipped round with a rapidity surprising in one of his bulk, and the next moment he was holding Warren's egg-sodden handkerchief under her nose.

"Think again, I told you, didn't I?" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Perhaps this will help you. Whose handkerchief is it, eh? Tell me."

If the inspector thought he could hector Clare into telling him what he wanted to know he made a mistake. He roused her pride. Although she felt deadly sick at the sight of the handkerchief, his blustering tone steadied her.

She looked at him for a moment through cold, proud eyes. "It is the handkerchief I wiped up the eggs with," she told him in a tone that was chilly as ice.

"Whose is it?"

"Mine, of course. I do not understand you, inspector."

"You don't, don't you?" he growled. "Well that's neither here nor there. You do not look to me the kind of girl that wipes up the floor with her handkerchief, nor one who

would use a man's handkerchief either. What about it?"

"It happened to be the first thing to hand," she returned with admirable coolness. "You will see that I finished it off with a duster. As to it being a man's handkerchief, you will find a bundle of my father's handkerchiefs in my drawer."

Just then the police surgeon arrived. He had been detained. Mason turned to Clare.

"You're clever, Miss Ashleigh," he said grimly as he stood towering over her, "and you've got plenty of nerve—I'll say that for you. But you don't make—a—good—liar! See?"

"I think that you forget yourself, inspector," she returned with quiet emphasis.

Mason half opened his mouth, closed it again, and blinked. "Eh?" he ejaculated in surprise. Then he laughed shortly. "Please remain here, Miss Ashleigh," he said; "I shall want to see you afterwards. Come, Barrows."

Winston Barrows rose from his seat near the window, and he and the divisional sergeant followed Mason and the surgeon into the other room.

The police surgeon made his examination. The murdered man was lying on his side, and from his back protruded the hilt of a dagger. There was practically no blood round the wound, but a little which had issued from the mouth stained the floor.



The surgeon withdrew the weapon carefully. After a while he looked up at the others.

"It entered in," he said, "just above the left shoulder-blade, damaging the aorta and piercing the lung. The bleeding is mostly internal."

"Was death instantaneous?" Winston Barrows wanted to know.

"Within a few minutes—not more than five—of the blow being struck. Rigor mortis has set in. I should say that death occurred about four o'clock."

"It would require great strength to deal a blow like that," said Mason thoughtfully.

"Yes," replied the surgeon. "As you saw the knife was driven in up to the hilt. Besides you say you believe it was done in the other room—it would require a strong man to carry the body in here so neatly."

"Just so. There is a small spot of blood on the carpet in there, and we found a plum on the floor with a smear of blood on it. Miss Ashleigh says that she dropped some things as she was entering the room. Anyhow, whoever did the killing made a clean job of it."

"Probably someone who knew where to place the blow."

"Ah!" exclaimed Barrows quickly. "Someone with surgical knowledge?"

The surgeon was thoughtful.

"Not necessarily—but it looks like it. Had the knife entered between the clavicle the blood would have gushed forth. As it is



the murderer reduced the risk of blood-stains to a minimum."

Mason turned the body over. As he looked searchingly into the dead face a low whistle issued from his lips.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "What do you make of that?" glancing significantly at Winston Barrows. "Looks as if the girl out there is mixed up in this affair after all."

Barrows, who had been gazing intently at the still face, nodded in agreement.

"There is a strong resemblance," he said.

"Resemblance! I should say there was. Thought that girl knew something about it. Strange men don't stray into a girl's room, at the very top of the house, too. What's the story, I wonder?"

"His pockets have been cleared out—even his watch has gone." Winston Barrows spoke slowly, as if he were thinking aloud rather than suggesting a probable motive for the murder. "I should say he came here to see Miss Ashleigh—that seems obvious—but he may have carried a large sum of money and been followed by someone who knew that he had it."

The inspector sniffed.

"You don't believe that, young feller—the robbery theory?"

"No, I don't," replied Winston frankly, looking at the others with a faint smile. "But one has to look at every possibility."

"There's not a paper of any sort; not

even a handkerchief nor any darned thing left," said the sergeant, who had been systematically going through the pockets of the dead man.

"For which reason I think that the robbery business is a blind," observed Barrows.

"Huh!" put in Mason. "That's what I think—it goes deeper than robbery. Hallo! What's this? He has overlooked something after all. They always do, no matter how dashed clever they think they are."

From an inside pocket Mason had drawn forth a small, flat case which he opened, then held it up triumphantly to Barrows.

"What did I say?" he asked. "That girl knows who did it."

Winston Barrows took the case and held it up to the light. It contained two small photographs, one on either side, facing each other. One was the photograph of a middle-aged man; the other that of a young girl. Of the originals one lay dead beside him; the other was the fair girl sitting in the next room—Clare Ashleigh.

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE BROKEN CUFF-LINK

**I**T seemed to Clare that a long time had elapsed before Mason and his two companions returned to the sitting-room. The police surgeon had taken his departure some time ago.

Clare had sat almost like a figure carved in stone. She was disquieted in mind because she was aware that she had made an enemy of Detective Inspector Mason. She realised that whereas he might make a staunch friend, he would surely make an implacable enemy. Naturally with his wide experience he could not be easily deceived with her untruths. As he had said, she did not make a good liar. Clare supposed it must be true. One needed practice to tell lies with an appearance of truth, and Clare hated lies or falseness of any kind. She had a strict sense of honour. A liar was not only a coward but an outsider; it was simply not done by decent people. It was her sense of honour and the claims of friendship, however, that forbade her involving Warren Elton in this trouble that had befallen her. Through a mistake he had



entered her room. Was he to suffer for that mistake to the extent of being charged with murder? Had she believed him guilty it would have been a different matter. Believing him innocent she acted as she considered right.

Mason seated himself again at the table facing her.

"Miss Ashleigh," he said, "if you came in at six o'clock how is it that you did not find out until nine that a murder had been committed in your room?"

"Because I did not go into the other room during that time," she replied.

"Was that not unusual?—would you not wish to remove your outdoor things?" Mason's experienced eyes had immediately taken in Clare's neat, well-groomed appearance, all the little niceties of person and dress that proclaimed an extreme fastidiousness of taste. As he told himself: "She's not the type of girl that throws her things about on chairs."

"I threw my hat and gloves on that chair when I came in," she told him, glancing towards the chair whereon her hat lay.

"So I see," he observed drily. He leaned forward suddenly, holding her gaze. "That was because you had someone with you," he declared, thrusting out his heavy chin after the manner of a bulldog preparing to fight.

Clare's heart missed a beat. He seemed so sure. She hesitated for a moment. Surely he

was bluffing her, trying to scare her into making a slip. She sat back in her chair with a little weary sigh.

"I had no one with me," she said in a gentle voice. "I came in alone. I was tired."

"Ah ! Well, we'll let that go for the present. Now tell me, Miss Ashleigh, who is the murdered man ? "

She gazed at him in amazement. His eyes, hard like flint, were riveted upon her.

"How should I know ? " she questioned. "I never looked—I only saw there was a man lying there."

"Perhaps you recognise this ? " and he held the photo-case before her astonished gaze.

"Oh, yes ; of course," she replied without a moment's hesitation. "That is a photograph of my father, and this, as you see, is one of mine. Wherever did you find this case ? "

"In the pocket of the murdered man," he told her with grim emphasis, his piercing eyes watching her every change of expression. There was blank consternation in her face.

"In the pocket—of—— My photo ! My father's ! Who is he ? " she asked in a low voice.

"That is what I want you to tell us."

"But I don't know—I have not seen him."

"Come then," and Mason rose.

"Oh, no ! " She drew back quickly.

"Please do not ask me." Then, seeing that



he waited. "Need I?" looking from Mason to Winston Barrows.

"Yes, I'm afraid it is necessary," Winston replied quietly. "You may be able to help us, you know," he added, with a smile of encouragement.

She rose without further protest and prepared to accompany them. She was wondering what else this calamitous night held for her and if it would ever end.

"Just one thing," put in Mason. "Have you seen this before?" and he held up the weapon that had been found in the body. It was a Malay kris of the short variety, about a foot in length, with an ornamented ebony handle.

Clare stared at it as if fascinated, then turned away with a shudder of repugnance.

"It belonged to my father," she said in a troubled tone.

"Ah! And when did you see it last?"

"This morning. I was polishing the handle. I always keep it on that table with the other curios," she added, indicating a low, oblong table near the window. "See, there is the sheath. I intended polishing that too—that is why I did not put the kris back."

"You left it lying loose on the table?"

"Yes." Then in answer to the censure in his tone. "I expected no one to enter my room—the maid had finished for the day."

"Queer ornament for a girl's room," observed Mason.



"The kris was given to my father by a friend who had visited Malaya. My father collected curios," she explained, "and when he died I did not like to sell them."

"Your father is dead?" exclaimed the inspector, quite taken aback.

"He died eighteen months ago."

Mason made no comment. He stood for a moment in deep thought. Suddenly his eyes became riveted upon something under the small table and near the wall. He swooped down upon it as a vulture upon its prey. He examined it carefully.

"To whom does this belong, Miss Ashleigh?"

She kept her composure with an effort.

"I don't know," she said.

He looked at her hard for a moment, scowled, then turned away. "Come," he said, motioning Clare towards the other room.

A shiver of apprehension swept through the girl, for Warren Elton's broken cuff-link, bearing his initials, that they had sought in vain, had been picked up by Detective Inspector Mason.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DETAINED

THE light had been turned down low and deep shadows lurked in the corners of the room. A silence imminent with the unseen met them on the threshold, the significant silence that attends the presence of death. Mason turned up the light and Clare caught sight of the body of the murdered man lying on the bed. She recoiled involuntarily, turning her head aside as one overcome by physical nausea. Winston Barrows, quietly watching her, observed with what effort she strove to retain a grip upon herself. "She is a game kid anyway," was his mental comment.

Clare hesitated near the door until the inspector beckoned her to the bedside. Reluctantly she approached that stark figure lying there so still, so quiet. He was a man of slight build, in height about five feet seven inches, his age somewhere between fifty-five and sixty. Clare wondered desperately why they forced her to gaze upon the body of this strange man who had never entered her life until now, when he was dead. The law was

cruel ; unnecessarily so ; it delighted in harrowing people's feelings. She glanced down, striving to hide the shrinking aversion, the shudder that ran through her. Just one glance, and then—then as she saw the ashen face, clean shaven, the mouth disfigured with dried blood, the grey hair, once fair as her own, that grew away from the right temple, the colour drained completely from her own face, leaving it white as a waxen flower. She put out a hand blindly to steady herself.

Winston Barrows caught her quickly, drew up a chair and put her into it. "Sit down," he said gently.

Instinctively Clare turned to him as a child to someone it trusts. "Who—who is it?" she whispered in a voice that was hoarse and strained.

"That is what I want you to tell us," put in Mason. He had abandoned his blustering tone. Clare's attitude puzzled him.

"But—I don't know."

"You mean to say that you have never seen him before?" the inspector asked sceptically.

"No. I have—never seen him," she replied quietly ; but her glance wandered in a kind of stupefied stare to the face of the dead man.

"You surely do not ask us to believe that in the face of these photographs," and Mason held up the small case, "*and* this,"



pointing to a large photograph mounted in a plain silver frame that stood on the mantelpiece.

"They are both photographs of my father," she said at once.

"And of this man," replied Mason grimly, indicating the figure on the bed.

"*Oh!*"

The cry seemed wrung from her. It was like the cry of a dumb creature wounded unto death. The next moment she was on her feet facing the inspector with eyes that glinted blue like the blue of steel, staring at him for a brief moment in outraged silence. Then she spoke. Her voice was low, but there was an arresting timbre in it, a poignancy of passion and emotion all the more accentuated by contrast with her previous calm tones.

"Do you dare suggest," she exclaimed indignantly, "that I would speak falsely concerning the death of my own father! You may be a police officer, but is that a reason why you should be less than a man? Of course it is your duty to find out who killed this poor man here—and I hope you will—but," she paused, forcing back the emotion that threatened to overcome her and with an imperious gesture staying the words the astonished inspector would have spoken—"but," she continued, her voice quivering with passion, "is that a reason why nothing should be held sacred, not even—"

death? I told you that my father died eighteen months ago; he died of fever in Trinidad. He was all I had—and—you——”

She turned aside, biting hard on her lips; her hands clenched tight together; her body swaying like a bruised lily in the wind.

Mason made a clicking noise with his mouth, then took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

“But that does not prevent your father having a twin brother, Miss Ashleigh,” he said.

“My father had no brother. I have no relations at all that I know of.”

“And you really expect me to believe that you don’t know why this man was in your room, nor who he is although he might have sat for that photo of your own father?”

She shook her head.

“I do not know why you bait me in this way, inspector,” she remonstrated. “I expect you to believe my word. I do not know why this man was here in my room, nor his identity, nor who killed him. I know nothing about him. If I knew I would tell you—why not? I cannot understand it at all.” She turned and quietly surveyed the dead man—she had quite recovered her composure. “They are not altogether alike—there are many differences between them. My father was taller than this man—he was six feet one inch in height. His hair was thicker,



with a curl in it—you can see that in the large photograph ; and, yes, the features are alike, but—oh, anyone who knew my father would see how great is the difference.”

“ And the remarkable likeness,” he reminded her.

Someone tapped at the door and a constable came in and spoke to Mason.

“ All right,” said the inspector. Then turning to Clare :

“ I will have to detain you, Miss Ashleigh,” he said. “ Please return to the sitting-room for the present.” He glanced meaningly at the constable, who nodded.

“ But why ? What does he mean ? ” she questioned of Winston Barrows.

“ I am sorry, Miss Ashleigh. However, it may be only for a few hours,” he added reassuringly. Then because he saw that she did not understand : “ Detention does not necessarily mean a charge against you.”

“ A charge against *me* ! ” she echoed, thinking that she could not have heard aright. Perhaps she saw a shade of pity in Winston’s face, for she turned away abruptly with a proud gesture.

Although the night was hot Clare felt suddenly cold, clammy cold. Detention ! Probably a charge to follow ! She was inexpressibly shocked. It was wholly unanticipated. She recalled something one of the other boarders had said : “ Will the police



arrest her? " At the time she had thought it merely a morbid conjecture on that person's part. But such a contingency had been so remote to Clare as not to be considered even for a moment. She had anticipated being questioned by the police since this terrible thing had happened in her room, but only as an outsider in no wise implicated in it. The inspector's questions and manner had caused her disquiet at first on Warren Elton's account; in some slight measure on her own after seeing the dead man. In the blinding light of this development her mental vision clarified. She saw now that she was suspected of either being guilty herself of, or being a party to, the murder. But the mere idea seemed so far-fetched as to be incredible, like a dreadful nightmare from which she would awaken. And yet—— To be detained meant to be under suspicion; that much was certain. Clare strove to put the thought away. She refused to entertain it in her mind. It was too horrible. The inspector was mad. She felt that a net was being woven about her from which she would not be able to extricate herself. The inspector was weaving it. He gathered the strands from that startling resemblance between that dread figure in the next room and her father, and from the photo-case found in the man's pocket. But how did this man, a complete stranger, have hers and her father's photographs in his pocket? Who

was he? Why was he in her room? It was very strange. She could not understand it. It was all a profound mystery. Then the thought flashed into her mind: "Was this man in any way connected with her coming to England?" It was just possible. She would receive a letter on her twenty-first birthday, two days hence, which would enlighten her as to her father's reason for sending her here. Perhaps she would learn something about this man then. Whether this proved to be so or not Clare began to realise that the inspector had grounds for his suspicions of her.

It was a very white and a very weary girl who was led out to the waiting car that was to take her to Divisional Headquarters. Her attitude expressed her usual quiet dignity, for though apprehensive of what lay ahead of her, and acutely conscious of the ignominy of her position, she refused to show aught to the curious eyes peeping at her through doors that stood carelessly ajar.

As they were passing her room, Miss Johnstone came out.

"I am sorry the police are taking this step. I suppose they must know their business; but they are making a grievous mistake this time. Anyone with a grain of sense would know that a slip of a girl like you could have nothing to do with it. Keep up your courage, child," and she put her arms round Clare and kissed her. "Everything will come right.

And remember if I can be of any service to you in any way——”

She broke off, and the next minute her door closed behind her. Clare followed Detective Inspector Mason downstairs with a lighter heart.



## CHAPTER IX

### LYONS' CORNER HOUSE

**I**N the meantime Mason had interviewed one of the maids, Lizzie Barker by name. Lizzie had sent a caller up to Miss Ashleigh's rooms about twenty minutes to four. This caller was a tall man with dark hair and a slight American accent. Oh, no ; he was not middle-aged, perhaps thirty, or a little over. He had asked to see Miss Ashleigh. As Miss Ashleigh's rooms were so far up, Lizzie had taken the visitor as far as the first floor, where she had something to do, and had sent him by himself the rest of the way. No, she did not know if he found Miss Ashleigh at home ; she did not see him after that and forgot all about him. She was quite certain of the time as she had looked at the hall clock a minute before she noticed the gentleman waiting at the front door.

A tall man with dark hair and about thirty to thirty-five years of age did not describe the murdered man. However, Mason knew that girls are given to make mistakes, so Lizzie, protesting with loud lamentations, was taken upstairs to see if she recognised him. She was

quite certain on that point also—the murdered man was *not* the man she had shown in. She had never seen the murdered man before, though she thought he reminded her of somebody.

A second maid was kept, one Annie Long. But Annie had been given leave until the following evening for the purpose of going to Bournemouth to see her mother, who was very ill. It was possible that she had admitted the dead man. She had not left the house until close on four o'clock.

“We can't wait until to-morrow evening for this girl,” said Mason. “We must get in touch with her before that. Someone admitted that man, and as no one here appears to have done so it must have been Annie Long. She might have something to tell us.”

Inquiries were set on foot; but Bournemouth produced no trace of either Annie Long or her sick mother. The police had doubted the sick mother. She, however, did not interest them. Annie did, and steps were taken to locate her.

At eight o'clock the following morning Clare was told that she was free, but that she must appear at the Coroner's Court for the inquest on Thursday. She was advised to remain on at Linden House for the present.

Clare was inclined to demur at this. The idea of returning to that house was repugnant to her—she never wanted to see the place again. But returning to Torrington Square



was a small matter compared with being free. Freedom after that night of captivity ! Clare felt that the taint of it would cling to her for ever. She had been treated with consideration. The wardress in whose care she had been placed had been not only respectful but kind. But—Clare had been a prisoner, and her proud spirit had suffered anguish with the shame of it. She felt like a wild bird thrust into a foul cage, that after breaking its heart, and beating its wings against the bars, suddenly finds the door open. It darts outside only to find its feathers clogged with the filth of its prison. Clare felt like that. She wanted to bathe her soul in flaming sunlight to rid her of its pollution. Clare did not know that her freedom had a specific object, namely to lead the police to the man who had been in her room the previous evening, the man whose initials were W.P.E.

Though not knowing that her freedom had a definite object in view, Clare was quite aware that the police would seek the owner of the broken cuff-link as hounds hunt their quarry once it has been sighted. Therefore she and Warren must not meet. He had arranged to call for her that night (Tuesday) to take her to the Trocadero. Of course that arrangement did not stand now. But Warren might not know that. He could only know through the papers ; but he might not bother to read up murders and things like that. She had better get in touch with him and make



sure; he must be prevented from keeping his appointment at all costs. But how?

This problem was exercising her mind when she left Divisional Headquarters—how to get in touch with Warren without the police knowing. She thought of sending a telegram; but put that aside as being too dangerous—the police could always get a copy of a telegram. If she wrote to him? But Clare was not sure of what powers the police had, though she imagined they must be all-powerful in a case of this kind. The fame of Scotland Yard was well known even in far Trinidad. Perhaps it would be safer to ring him up.

A taxi was passing and Clare hailed it, telling the driver to take her to the Strand. Here she mingled with the crowds that were already thronging the streets. From there she boarded a bus going to another part of the city. Here she slipped into one of Lyons' restaurants, where she ordered some breakfast. While waiting for her order to be brought she went into the telephone booth, closing the door carefully behind her. No fresh arrival had come into the café after her, so she hoped all was well. She got on to the Russell Hotel immediately, and a moment later heard Warren Elton's voice.

In a few guarded words she explained that he must not come to Torrington Square.

"Sure thing. And I'm real sorry for you, Kid. But I have just got to speak to you.

Got that? Say, go to Lyons' Corner House for lunch. Go early, it's always crowded. Turn to left upstairs. I'll meet you. What's that? No fear! You must or I'll go to the — You will? Good. Don't worry. We'll put it across 'em between us. You're not alone in this, little girl."

Clare returned to Torrington Square feeling immensely cheered. Warren's voice had been so bright; he seemed so sure of himself. Maybe they would "put it across them" after all.

Although the body of the murdered man had been removed to the police mortuary, Clare's rooms were still in the hands of the police. Not that that mattered to Clare. No power under the sun could have made her use those rooms again. A small back room on the same landing as Miss Johnstone's was vacant and she engaged that temporarily. The proprietor gave her clearly to understand the impermanence of the arrangement. The residents of Linden House had hitherto been above suspicion; now there had been a murder and his house was in the hands of the police. He doubted if any of his boarders would care to remain on in these circumstances—he would be a ruined man undoubtedly. Clare gathered that it was only by the wish of the police that she was permitted to be there at all. It was a hateful position to be in. She felt like a pariah dog that is driven out of the compound; but after her detention



last night his discourtesy had no power to wound. She even found it in her heart to be sorry for Scott, for this tragedy in his house was likely to cause him financial loss and the man had to get his living. As for his attitude to her, it was unpleasant ; but some people when hurt find it necessary to vent their misfortune upon a scapegoat. In this instance she was the scapegoat. Clare gave a little sigh. Philosophy is cold comfort for any girl in her position, and she found it so—cold and unsatisfactory. She was glad when she got rid of him and she was able to turn her key for a little while on him and the outside world even if unable to turn it upon her thoughts.

It was twelve forty-five when Clare entered the Corner House. Already the tables were filling up, but she managed to get a seat where Warren had suggested. There was no sign of him anywhere. She ordered her lunch and was not displeased when she was kept waiting for it. When it was brought to her she ate it leisurely, the while she wondered however Warren would find her in the now overcrowded room. Every seat seemed to be occupied and people were still streaming into the place. The hubbub of conversation, the clatter of plates, and the music of the orchestra all combined to make a medley of sound which was confusing when her ears were listening for one voice. It was not until she was sipping her coffee that she heard it beside her.

“ Say, this is a pleasure, Miss Ashleigh.



It's a long time since I saw you. What are you doing in London anyway? "

" I'm living here," she replied as she shook hands.

" You don't say? " Then someone vacating the chair next Clare he sat down and offered his cigarette case. " I'm rare sorry, Clare, about last night," he said in a low voice. " I've wanted to do something mad ever since. But see, we daren't speak here." He slipped a paper under cover of the menu. " Go to this address at three o'clock this afternoon. We can talk freely there——"

" But——"

" You must, honey girl. It will be all right ; sure, I promise you. I must talk to you—it's important for us both. You will ; I daren't stay now. Don't look, but I've a hunch that guy there in the grey suit at the corner table is interested some—thought so. Glad to have seen you."

He was gone. Clare looked across to the corner table. The man in grey had gone also.

## CHAPTER X

### A MEETING IN GOWER STREET

**N**OT until she was safe within the shelter of her own room did Clare look at the address given her by Warren.

WINSTON E. BARROWS,  
31a Gower Street,  
W.C.1.

Barrows? The name seemed familiar. Surely she had heard it recently. Of course, that was it; one of the men who came last night with Detective Inspector Mason was named Barrows. But why did Warren want her to go to his address—supposing it to be the same man? He was a detective. What was Warren thinking of? He would be arrested just as soon as he arrived there. And yet he seemed confident about it. She had rather liked Mr. Barrows; he was not trying to fasten a crime upon her all the time like the inspector. Anyway she would go as she had promised.

There came a knock at her door. It was Miss Johnstone.

"I heard that you had returned," she said, "so thought I would just look in and see how you are. You don't mind, do you?"

"I am glad to see you," replied Clare. "Won't you sit down?" and she drew up a chair.

"No; I'm not going to stop now. You had no sleep last night? No, I thought not. You look utterly worn out and in need of rest."

"I am just going to lie down now, but I must go out again before three."

"That's a pity—that you have to go out again, I mean. Well, lie down now, and don't waste time making tea or anything before you go. I'll have a cup of tea ready for you."

"But, Miss Johnstone," exclaimed Clare, "I really cannot let you put yourself to so much trouble——"

"No trouble at all. But I do not want to force myself upon you or be a nuisance."

"Nuisance!" echoed the girl. "Your belief in me helps tremendously." She smiled a little. "I would appreciate your friendship, Miss Johnstone."

"You have it, child, for what it is worth. But it is not a friendly act to keep you now when you are ready to drop with fatigue. I'll bring your tea at a quarter to three—will that be time enough? Yes? All right then."

Miss Johnstone's heart had gone out to Clare. The girl seemed so lonely, so young to be involved in such a terrible tragedy. She looked desperately white, too; frozen up;



too self-contained—as if she were putting a terrible restraint upon herself. Miss Johnstone, while admiring Clare's self-control, feared that such complete repression of emotion presaged a sudden breakdown. The friendship of a woman like Miss Johnstone was just what Clare needed at this juncture. She was so wholesome and matter-of-fact. There was no sloppy sentimentality or curious prying into her affairs—only a willingness to serve.

Just before three o'clock Clare set out for Gower Street. She had not far to go, the number she sought being near the Society of Authors. She was shown immediately into a front room, half office, half study. Winston Barrows was expecting her.

"Good afternoon, Miss Ashleigh," he said. "I am glad you have come. I think you will find this a comfortable chair."

Clare sat down, then looked up into the strong, quiet face of the young detective. It inspired confidence. She liked his voice too; it was low and cultured, the voice of a gentleman. Even the night before, distressed and upset as she had been, she had noticed this with a subconscious sense of gratification—he was a man of her own class.

"I do not know really why I have come," she began.

He smiled.

"That is all right." He opened a door leading to an inner room. "Miss Ashleigh is

here," she heard him say, and wondered to whom he was speaking. When Warren Elton came in she understood.

"So you have come, Clare," he exclaimed in a tone indicative of a profound relief, as he crossed over to where she sat. "That's real fine. I was feared some in case you didn't. I wanted to see you awfully bad, and this is the only safe place I know about. Were you followed here, Clare?"

"I am not certain, but I think so."

Clare was feeling a little bewildered.

Winston Barrows had crossed over to the window. "Come here, please, Miss Ashleigh," he said. "No, not too near or you might be seen. Do you see that man over there?"

She looked through the lace curtains at the man strolling casually along on the other side of the street, and her eyes opened wide.

"Is he——"

"Yes. He is one of Mason's men."

"But why?" she demanded with spirit. "Why should I be followed about, and detained on suspicion, and altogether treated as if I had—had murdered that man? It is perfectly horrible. You, too, are a police officer, are you not?"

"Sit down again, Miss Ashleigh, and I will explain. To begin with I am no longer attached to Scotland Yard, but am what you would call a private detective; that is to say I work independently of the Yard."



"Look here, Clare," put in Warren. "Mr. Barrows is a big noise. He's real famous both sides of the water."

Barrows laughed in genuine amusement.

"Cut it out, Elton," he said.

"Nothing doing. I've got to make things plain to Clare. She still has doubts. Barrows is the man who smashed the Crown Swindle, Clare—I'll tell you about it another time when we are through with this job. Anyway he got into the limelight in N' York as well as in England, and when I read this morning's papers I guessed he was the one man in London I'd got to see. He is taking up this case for us. He is going to find out who bumped that man off and all about it. That means getting us out of what looks like being some big hole, and preventing those darned cops from putting any more indignities upon you. Detaining you, Clare! you poor kid! And while I am talking, Barrows, I'll put you wise about things—in case of complications, you know. I've sent a code wire to the Dad to come to London. He will come straight along to you and be where you want him. So you can go right ahead."

Winston nodded and turned to Clare who looked earnestly into his face.

"But you were there last night—with the police——"

"I happened to be at the police station when the call came through. Mason asked me if I would like to accompany him, that's



all. Now," he added, "if I am to do anything I must be in possession of *all* the facts," and he looked significantly at Clare, who reddened and became confused.

"You mean?" Her tone was hard.

Winston shook his head and smiled deprecatingly.

"It won't do—you will have to own up if you want me to help you, and you will have to trust me. Mr. Elton was with you last evening, was he not?"

Clare flushed painfully and gave a quick glance towards Warren.

"It's all right, Clare. I haven't had time to tell anything yet; but this is where we do it—see?" And he proceeded to give Winston a straightforward account of what had happened the previous evening. "But I'd no idea," he added, "that my blunder was going to bring about all this trouble for Clare. Why did you not tell Mason that I was there, Clare? I guess it put his back up some if he thought you were withholding something from him."

"There was no need to bring you into it when you had no connection with it," she replied simply.

The expression in the young man's eyes as they met Clare's brought the colour to her cheeks.

"You are some girl, Clare," he said.

"What is the name of the American friend you met?" asked Winston.

"John H. Dennison," replied Warren promptly.

"He lives next to Linden House, I presume?"

"He did. He was out when I called there after leaving Clare last night, and had left when I rang him up this morning."

Barrows regarded the young man curiously.

"You know where he has gone, of course?"

"No, I don't. That's the rub. And the people at the house couldn't put me wise either—he had left quite early to catch some train or other. I have a hunch it was the outcome of his appointment last night."

"It is a wonder that he did not ring you up or drop you a line, is it not?"

"He did not know where to find me. There was no time to tell him anything. He was in some hurry. I met him near the Museum at the top of the Square. We just gripped and he asked me to go along to his room and wait for him—he would be back in half an hour or so. He had an urgent business appointment right then, and was late. He was half-way up the street before he had finished talking. Some hurry I tell you."

Winston was thoughtful for a moment. Then: "You are in England on business, Mr. Elton?"

"Sure. Dad's business. To push the sale of the Elton cars."

"Your father's business? Is it not yours also?"



Warren smiled genially.

"You bet. If it is the Dad's it is mine. But I am supposed to be taking up the medical profession——"

"Medical?" put in Winston quickly.

"Sure. Just passed out. But the Dad wanted me to work up a hustle on this side with his cars before I started in on my job. He wants me to go in with him and has offered me a partnership on my return, so that I can take over altogether later on. I am the only son, you know."

"I see."

Barrows was silent for some time fitting in this information with the knowledge that was already his—the surgeon's words: "Someone who knew where to place the blow." He turned to Clare.

"Miss Ashleigh, if I am to help you I must know something more about you. The facts as they stand make things awkward for you—the man being found in your room; his remarkable likeness to your father—and to yourself; his being in possession of yours and your father's photographs, and the weapon used not only belonged to you, but is a most unusual weapon for any girl to keep."

"Oh, say!" exclaimed Elton in dismay. "It's not all that, is it?"

The boy had gone white. For the first time his face had lost its bright cheeriness that was so characteristic of him.



Winston nodded gravely.

"But—but——" The glance that fell on Clare was much troubled. "Say, Barrows," he burst out wrathfully, "you sure understand that Clare knows nothing whatever about this beastly business. She knows no more than you or I——"

"I am certain she does not," put in Winston drily, with a keen glance at the other. "All the same," he added, "there is the evidence; added to that is the fact that she was shielding someone."

"*Gee!* I'm everlasting sorry. I seem to have landed you into it, Clare. But, say, Barrows, you can fix that; you can put the cops wise about me."

"You would be arrested immediately." Barrows was watching the boy intently now.

Warren stiffened; his face paled again. "I sure wouldn't like that," he returned frankly, and with a forced smile. "But I am not putting a girl there. I don't know a darned thing about it, so I guess it would be up to you to get me out of the mess—I guess the Dad would put every detective in England on the job, he would be that wild and upset."

"I quite understand," remarked Winston slowly, and a faint smile just touched the corners of his mouth. "Well," he added, "I think we will leave things as they are for the present. Now, you are sure you want me to take up this case?"

Warren shot a quick, questioning glance at the detective.

"Dead sure," he said in a hard tone.

"Right. I'll do it. But remember I am out to find the person who did that murder, and when I do, be it man or woman, I hand him, or her, over to justice."

Warren gave the other a prolonged stare. Then he laughed a little uncertainly.

"Sure thing," he said. "But aren't you English chaps just curious!"

"Maybe we are," returned Winston grimly, "but we happen to be like that." He turned again to Clare. "Now, Miss Ashleigh, you understand your position?"

"Yes, I suppose so," she admitted. "But, Mr. Barrows," she said earnestly, "I really know no more than you do whom the man is, nor who murdered him."

"Shall I tell you what I think? That this man, whether you know him or not—is some relation of your father's and that he came to see you for some reason."

Clare looked troubled.

"As I told Inspector Mason last night," she said, "my father had no relations—that I know of. But——"

"Yes?"

"There was something father said to me—oh, some years ago—that gave me the impression that he left England because of some trouble, something that embittered him. I know nothing for certain. But there



are some private papers with the lawyers," she added.

"Private papers ! Of what nature ? "

"My parents' marriage certificate, and my certificate of birth. I do not know what else. After father's death, Mr. Murdock—my father's lawyer in Trinidad—gave me a letter. In this letter my father intimated the possibility of my receiving a call to England which he wished me to accept. Should the call not come he wished me to proceed to England prior to my twenty-first birthday, on which day Messrs. Harper and Braddell, a firm of lawyers in Chancery Lane, would hand me certain private papers. After reading these I was to consult Harper and Braddell about them."

"Have you seen these lawyers yet ? "

"No. There was no immediate hurry. They will pay me my allowance while I am in England, and it is only just about due now. I received the last amount from Mr. Murdock just before leaving Trinidad. In accordance with my father's instructions he also opened a bank account for me in London with £500. Father wanted me to have money in hand when I arrived here ; he said that I might have to incur unlooked-for expenses."

"Yes. Well I think that you had better have a look at those papers without loss of time. It would be advisable not to wait for your birthday in the circumstances."

Clare smiled. "I am twenty-one tomorrow," she told him.



"You are? Splendid. You will go to Harper and Braddell's in the morning? About ten o'clock would be a good time."

"Yes; I will do that."

"Now, just a couple more questions. You will think you are doing nothing else but answer questions, I'm afraid. But we detectives are an inquisitive crowd, you know."

Clare could appreciate that. "It all depends upon how the questions are put, Mr. Barrows," she said. "You are trying to help me, not to prove me guilty."

"True. I gather from what you said just now that your father was not born in Trinidad?"

"Oh, no. Both he and my mother were born in England. Father was twenty-five when he went to Trinidad, but he had been in America for about a year before that."

"Can you give me any idea what part of England your father came from and who his people were?"

"No. But he used to talk a lot about Surrey and of some place called Godalming."

"Did he correspond with anyone in England?"

"He used to receive letters at long intervals. Sometimes these letters had the Godalming postmark, at other times it was London. In either case the handwriting was the same."

Winston put a few further questions. Then:

"I think that will do for to-day, Miss Ashleigh. You have been very patient. I will

see you at Linden House to-morrow after you return from Chancery Lane."

"Thank you. And may I say how thankful I am that you are acting for us. It is such an immense relief to know there is someone working for us instead of against us."

He looked down at her and his expression was kind.

"You have had a painful experience, Miss Ashleigh. Let us hope the worst is over—for you."

"I wish I could see you home, Clare," said Warren, coming to her as she rose.

"It would not be very wise, Mr. Elton," remarked Winston, with a meaning glance towards the window where the man in grey could still be seen sauntering along on the other side of the road.

"Say, dash it all ! They sure can't arrest me yet ?"

"It has been done before," Winston reminded him.

"What have they got on me anyway ?" demanded Warren.

Winston Barrows shrugged.

"Some stunt this," grumbled Warren, who would have given much to accompany the girl who had fluttered into his heart as a bird to its nest. "What will my Dad say ?" he asked. "He sends me over here to do big business for him and you police chaps immediately want to arrest me."

"Please do not run any unnecessary risks,

Warren," begged Clare earnestly. "It would only complicate everything were you to be arrested."

He looked into her troubled face. His own cleared and he laughed whimsically.

"Don't you worry any, baby girl," he said. "You can take it from me that I didn't come to this little country to study your prison system." He took Clare's two hands in his and held them in a strong clasp while he gazed deeply into the blue eyes. "You are sure being put through it, Clare, and I'm darned sorry. I feel I want to do something real desperate. But you just go home and rest now, and don't worry any more. You've got friends who will do all that for you. Mr. Barrows will sure clear up the whole darned business, and then, Clare—you understand, honey girl?"



## CHAPTER XI

### WHAT THE INSPECTOR HAD TO TELL

**W**ITHIN half an hour of Clare's departure Winston Barrows received a call from Detective Inspector Mason. The inspector made no attempt to beat about the bush.

"What did that girl come here for? Oh, you know which girl well enough," he added impatiently in answer to Winston's innocent look of inquiry—"I mean Miss Ashleigh."

"I was expecting you, Mason," returned Winston blandly. "I saw your man."

"Huh! Well?"

"I am taking up the case for her."

"For *her*?"

"Why not? You detained her. She did not like it, naturally. I am to find out who really did murder the man. She does not want to suffer any more—indignities I think was the word used," and Winston Barrows smiled serenely at the burly inspector, who grunted with disdain.

"She's a deep one—thought she was," he said.

"Miss Ashleigh had nothing to do with it."

Mason straightened in his chair and stared hard at the younger man. He knew Barrows ; knew him for a clever detective who had been one of the Yard's own men until, for private reasons, he threw in his hand in order to work independently. Mason valued his judgment, and was quite ready to acknowledge that more than once he had been indebted to Winston's astuteness in bringing a case to a successful conclusion.

"Is that bluff?" he asked.

"No."

"Huh ! Now listen to me, young feller m'lad. I want to get this straight. I took you along to the scene of the crime, did I not ? Well—you know——"

"Mason, I am ashamed of you," broke in Winston. "Have I not always played the game with you ? I am out to clear Miss Ashleigh, in other words I am out to find the guilty party. If I am successful, I'll hand him—or her—over to you. You ought to know that."

Mason was abashed.

"True. So I should—so I should," he admitted. "But I wanted to be sure. Now, having got that settled I don't mind telling you something which will change your mind about Miss Ashleigh. Her name is Clare, is it not ? Well, the name of the murdered man is Claremont. Strange—what ?"

"Ah !"



"No coincidence either, you can take it from me. He is the owner of Claremont Park, a jolly fine property down in Surrey, near Godalming."

Winston had his eyes on the table-cloth, so that Mason did not notice the quick flash in them. Godalming! Clare thought her father came from Surrey, and some of the letters he used to receive came from Godalming.

"We have not been able to look into his family history yet. That picture we took of him was recognised by a clerk in Harper and Braddell's. You know the firm?—solicitors in Chancery Lane. This young fellow came along to the morgue and identified him. Claremont was a client of theirs. He could not tell me much about his affairs—he has not been long with the firm himself. Claremont's will is lodged there; we will see what that can tell us—motive for the murder probably. We are held up until to-morrow as Braddell is over in Paris on business, and Harper, as you probably know, died two years ago."

Winston was an intent listener. He was comparing what Mason told him with what he had already heard from Clare. It all tallied.

"So far," he said, "you have not told me anything to alter my opinion. We imagined Miss Ashleigh must be a relative of the dead man whether she knew it or not."

"You wait, young feller. I haven't finished.



That girl is in it, I tell you—up to the neck. I have just come back from Claremont Park—had to return to see to something here; but I am going back there now. No one down there worried when Claremont failed to return home last night. It appears that he was rather given to stopping in London for a night or two just as the fancy took him. But they expected him to return this morning as Claremont had a visitor coming to lunch with him, a man from London. And now you listen. The man who was expected was an American. Did he turn up for lunch? Not he. Why? Because he knew it was futile to go all the way down there to take lunch with a dead man—see? Now this is the point. Clare Ashleigh met an American in the Corner House this morning. Our man saw the American chap speak to her, and thought at first it was but a casual meeting. But his orders were to follow up any man she met; and he did. The young chap gave the show away by bolting. He gave our man the slip too. But we'll rope him in yet. If he is not the man who was with her last evening I'll—well, I will swallow my own head."

Winston grinned cheerfully.

"Hope that I will be a spectator when the operation takes place," he said. "What about Annie Long?"

"Turned up this evening as brazen as they make 'em. Swore by all her purple gods that

she knew nothing about anything. She didn't care a tuppenny cuss when she found the 'sick mother' yarn had broken down, but volunteered the information that she had been to a friend's place in Battersea. There was a dance on down there. She and her friend went to the dance and returned with the cat in the morning. That was why she wanted to-day off, to effect a recovery. I happen to know there was a dance on at the place she mentioned, so I am inclined to believe her."

"Does she know anything about Claremont? Did she let him in?"

"Just coming to that. At first she denied having seen him; she thought we were going to charge her with the murder or something," and Mason chuckled at an amusing reminiscence of his interview with Annie. "She told us afterwards," he went on, "and made things blacker than ever for Miss Ashleigh. It was about five minutes to four when Claremont called. He asked for Miss Ashleigh. Annie, who was all dressed up and in a hurry to be off, told him that Miss Ashleigh was upstairs in her sitting-room, and sent him up on his own. Sort of thing Annie would do." And Mason laughed shortly. "She said she was not going to run her legs off taking visitors up to the top floor or calling people down either, especially when she wanted to dance half the night. Tells you her mind, Annie does."



"But Miss Ashleigh was out," objected Winston.

"Phut ! So was her grandmother," retorted Mason rudely. "Annie says that she was *in* ; that's good enough for me. She had forgotten to put some clean towels in Miss Ashleigh's bedroom, and had run up with them a few minutes before Claremont came. While there she heard her pushing up the window in the sitting-room ; says she was trying to push it up and down as if it was sticking."

"I see."

"That is not all either. It appears that just as Annie was leaving the house she found that she had left her hand-bag behind and remembered having it in her hand when she went to Miss Ashleigh's bedroom. So she trailed up again feeling as angry as you like. The sitting-room door was closed, but she heard someone say : '*You ! Oh, my God !*' "

"Did she know the voice ? "

"No. But it was a man's voice."

"Claremont's ? "

"She couldn't say. Said it sounded strange and thick. Unfortunately she did not wait to hear any more. She wanted to get away before Scott found out that she had not done something or other she was supposed to have done. But here is proof that Miss Ashleigh was in her sitting-room, that she had a man with her, and that this man showed extreme



agitation on being confronted with Claremont. A few minutes later Claremont was dead. What do you make of that? "

" That there is no proof that Miss Ashleigh was in her room. The man who recognised Claremont was the person who put up the window. Were there any marks on the window? "

" Yes. Fairly good ones. The sill was dusty."

" I would like to see those prints. I will go up to the Yard and have a look at them. It is a pity there were none on the kris; they would have been the same as those on the window."

" I agree. He was cute enough to wipe the kris, though. Anyway the man was there with that girl when Claremont arrived."

Winston shook his head with decision.

" The man was there; the girl was not."

" What would he be doing there in her absence? "

Winston shrugged his shoulders.

" My good man," he replied, " are not visitors left to go upstairs on their own?—the man Lizzie Barker sent up at twenty minutes to four, for instance. He must have waited expecting Miss Ashleigh to appear any moment."

" Huh! " exclaimed Mason, raising his heavy bulk from the chair and taking up his hat. " That is the man we want, of course."

But he was not alone. Anyone could see that the girl was lying like a good one. She was there when the killing was done. Now she is trying to screen the murderer——”

“Look here, Mason,” Winston interrupted. “Your summing up of Miss Ashleigh is incorrect. She is not the sort of girl to screen a murderer.”

The inspector stuck out his chin belligerently and his clenched fist came down with a thump on the table.

“Any girl living would screen her lover,” he asserted in an emphatic tone.

“He would not be Miss Ashleigh’s lover if he were a slayer,” replied Winston quietly.

It was with a strange expression that the inspector regarded the younger man for a moment or two. He nodded regretfully once or twice. Then :

“Look here, young feller m’lad,” he said, “you are getting off the track. That girl is getting hold of you. I told you she is a deep one.”

Winston Barrows gave the other a straight look. Mason’s manner became less assured and he stroked his chin uncomfortably.

“Don’t be a bigger ass than is necessary, Mason,” Winston told him. “Miss Ashleigh is neither a ‘deep one,’ nor a screener of criminals. She is merely a straightforward English girl with an English girl’s sense of decency and honour.”

“Bah !” retorted the other. “There’s

none so blind as those who won't see what is staring them in the face. Some people want to see things on the screen and to hear them on the loud speaker before they believe 'em. As for me I want the man who was with Miss Ashleigh yesterday."



## CHAPTER XII

### AT CLAREMONT PARK

**W**INSTON BARROWS watched Mason pass up the street, then he touched the bell on his table. A minute later the door opened to admit the Pup.

Nearly eighteen months had passed since Winston had severed his connection with Scotland Yard, and he still retained the Pup's services. The boy had changed very little in that time. He was a little taller perhaps, but his age might still have been anything from eleven to sixteen. Winston Barrows, ex-colonel, with a D.S.O. to his credit, remained the Pup's hero, his tin god to whom he offered an admiring homage and a faithful service that the man appreciated. These two, the man and the boy, the one gently bred and with all the advantages that wealth and education could bestow upon him, the other a gamin of the East End who had scratched for a living like a London sparrow, were knit closely together by ties not easily severed. Each owed his life to the other on more than one occasion. They had been in tight corners

together, and each knew that he could place implicit trust in the other. The Pup would never have dreamt of doubting the infallible wisdom of his hero. Winston's word was law. The Pup gave him strict obedience. However, during hours of recreation, when he was free to follow his own bent, the Pup relaxed with an abandon that regulated the pendulum of his life to a nicety.

"See here, Pup," said Winston, as the boy came briskly forward, "you saw that gentleman who came here just before three o'clock?"

"Yessir. American gent. In love with the young lidy as come afterwards."

Winston Barrows surveyed the small figure from top to toe while a smile of amusement played about the corners of his mouth.

"How did you learn that, Pup?"

"Heard 'im," replied the Pup with brevity.

"Heard him say that he was in love? Surely not."

"Crikey, no! But when you 'ear a gent ask if a young lidy 'as arrived in a voice like a kid asking for thruppence—all excited like—then you know as he's in love with that there lidy—see?"

"I see. Quite good logic, Pup. Would you recognise him if you saw him again?"

"Not 'alf, Gov'nor," returned the Pup, his bird-like eyes sparkling at the thought of another "case." He was an insatiable reader of such literature as "thunder and lightning"



yarns, and a case was a "yarn" in real life, all the more thrilling for the active part assigned to himself.

"His name is Elton," went on Winston, "and he is staying at the Russell Hotel. I want you to keep track of him, Pup. If he leaves the Russell—and I think that he will—find out where he goes. Understand?"

The Pup's eyes narrowed and he nodded knowingly at Winston.

"You bet, sir," he said, with a roguish wag of his head.

Winston opened a drawer and took therefrom some money.

"You had better not be short—he may take you far afield. Now off you go."

The Pup saluted with military precision and vanished.

Winston Barrows smiled to himself as the door closed. He knew that once Elton was picked up by the Pup he had as little chance of escaping his vigilance as a young cygnet the watchful eye of its mother. There was an A.B.C. Guide on the table. This Winston opened and turned to the trains for Godalming. There was one leaving Waterloo Station at 6.12, arriving at Godalming at 7.8. That train he caught.

At Godalming he took a taxi to Claremont Park, a matter of several miles. There was a slight breeze which was acceptable after the stifling heat of London. The spell of hot weather still held, and the ground looked



parched, the vegetation thirsted for the rain that seemed as far off as ever.

At length the taxi turned in through a handsome, wrought-iron gateway, entering a drive that swept through many acres of undulating parklands. Gradually the park gave place to wide, sweeping lawns, velvet-soft with age and graced with many a fine old oak or copper beech. Winston gave an involuntary exclamation of pleasure when the house, a stately grey pile standing on a slight eminence, came into view. A stone terrace ran the whole length of the building, from which a wide flight of steps led to a rose terrace, and again to a well-laid-out garden rejoicing in a riot of bloom. To the left the lawns led to thick woods in all the glory of full leafage, and, as a fitting background to the dignified old mansion, some tall firs rose darkly against the evening sky.

Winston stopped the taxi while yet some distance from the house, preferring to walk the rest of the way. The scene was an expression of peace and æsthetic beauty where the very thought of bloodshed and the evil passions of men seemed anomalous. Yet Winston wondered if this fair place—in verity one of the “stately homes of England”—would prove to be the *motif* of the murder of its late owner. He found himself hoping that Clare Ashleigh might reign here as mistress. She was as much out of place at Linden House as a pearl in a cheap setting.

Claremont Park was her rightful background ; its dignity and stateliness a complement to her loveliness and grace.

And Warren Elton ? If Clare reigned here as mistress would not Elton reign as master ? Winston Barrows was aware of their attraction, the one to the other. His face clouded. He felt irresistibly drawn to the boy ; his charm of person and manner was not to be denied. But—it was that “ but ” that brought the shadow to the man’s face. It was not easy to connect that bright American lad with crime. He seemed the quintessence of frankness and uprightness. All the same during his career as a detector of crime, Winston had come across criminals who looked as innocent as cooing doves, having fascination of personality calculated to deceive a psychoanalyst. Human nature was like gunpowder, harmless enough until it came in contact with the fire of temptation, then—well, it all depended on character, on what inward safeguards a person had—the grace of religion, moral principles, or whatever it might be. But Winston Barrows was experienced enough to know that while religion had the strength of a spiritual power, moral philosophy was oftentimes as a dam across a river, sufficient under normal conditions, but under flood pressure collapsing as a thing of straw. As witness men who lived exemplary lives for years, regarded and revered as respectable members of society. Suddenly a temptation,



fierce as hell, presents itself, and in a moment they throw everything to the four winds, wife, children, home, the respect of decent men and women, the very hope of heaven, to grovel as a pig in the mud of desire.

From his observation during the short time at his disposal, Winston was inclined to attribute to Warren the possession of sterling qualities. But he had to keep an open mind where this young man was concerned. There were certain things which told heavily against him—his medical knowledge; the fact that in every particular he answered to Lizzie Barker's description of the man who was sent to Clare's room at twenty minutes to four; his presence in her room, and his inability to produce his friend, one John Dennison. Against these unfavourable factors was the fact that he had come to Winston, though its value was reduced insomuch that he came from a country where, not infrequently, hard cash stood between even a murderer and the penalty of his crime. However, Elton's father might be twenty times a millionaire, but, in England, that would not avail the son should he prove guilty of murder. Again, his being in Clare's sitting-room as late as six o'clock strongly supported his assertion of innocence. If guilty it would have been madness to remain on the scene of his crime running the risk of discovery at any moment. Attracted as he was by Warren's joyous personality, Winston would not permit this to bias his



judgment. But he would be glad to prove him innocent.

Thus busy with his thoughts he walked on until he reached a turn in the drive. Here he drew up short, his thoughts scattered to the limbo of forgotten things. A man had suddenly darted out from the side of the house, had crossed the intervening strip of lawn, and vanished into the woods. So rapid had been his movements that Winston's glimpse of him had been but momentary. That glimpse aroused his suspicions. Why should anyone leave the house in that furtive manner? Hardly a moment had flashed by before Winston was in pursuit.

It took scarcely more than a minute to reach the spot where the man had disappeared. There was no sign of him. Winston pressed forward seeking some track, some mark to show which way the man had gone. But evening shadows were already collecting in the thick woods, blurring outlines, rendering concealment a simple matter. He stood for a moment listening for the snap of a branch; hurried footsteps. But the air was full of the sound of birds preparing for the night, twittering, trilling, mate calling to mate, or a sudden darting from one bush to another with fluttering of wings, and shaking and disturbance amongst the leafage. The tang of hot grass was in his nostrils and the scent of the hot evening air. Brambles stretched out long, clutching arms to stay his progress.

And Winston stayed because it was but waste of time to seek further. Whosoever the man was he had gone, gone completely. Who was he, and why was he leaving the house in that surreptitious manner? Winston would have given much to be able to answer these questions.

Making his way to the house he rang the bell. A footman opened the door and he entered a hall of noble proportions, and of a stately, sombre beauty with its dark oak panelling, its minstrel gallery, its magnificent sweeping staircase, its Jacobean fireplace.

The butler, a man in his sixties, of quiet, respectful demeanour, would have shown Winston to the library.

"The police officers are there, sir," he said. "You would like to join them?"

"Yes, presently. There are just one or two questions I want to ask you first, Johnstone. Your name is Johnstone? Yes? Oh, and by the way," he added, quite casually. "Who left the house a few minutes ago?"

A startled look swept into the butler's face.

"No one that I know of," he answered. His manner was guarded. Then he added: "No one has been here except the police; they are still in the library. But James would know. Shall I inquire?"

"Oh, no. Not at all. It is quite unimportant. Besides, the man I saw did not leave by the front door."



"Oh, then it must have been one of the servants then," put in Johnstone quickly.

"He came," said Winston, looking at him, "from a room on the south side of the house—he went into the woods."

The butler's eyes sought the ground.

"Most certainly one of the servants, sir."

"I see. Then that is all right," and Winston appeared to dismiss the matter with a wave of his hand. He changed the subject.

"I am afraid your master's—er—death has been a terrible shock to you, Johnstone," he said.

"Yes, indeed, sir," the man replied in a tone of deep feeling; and Winston could see that his grief was genuine enough. "I've been here over thirty years and he was always a good master to me."

"Did Mr. Claremont have a brother, do you know?"

Johnstone showed surprise.

"Not that I ever heard of," he said.

"And the stepson—he is away, I believe?"

There was an almost imperceptible hesitation before the butler's answer: "He is in America, sir."

America—then why the hesitation? Winston turned a keen glance upon the old man's face; so troubled—more than troubled, Winston thought; anguished more nearly expressed it.

"Was he on good terms with his stepfather?" questioned Winston.



There was no mistaking the distinct look of fear that shot into the man's eyes. That was the second time that Winston had caught that sudden fear. Of what was he afraid?

"Oh, yes, sir," he returned quickly; too quickly, thought Winston. "They have always been like real father and son," he went on. "He was but a very little chap when he came here—five or six years, that's all—and since the young master's death—he was killed in the war—Master Hawtry has been everything to his stepfather."

"Quite so. Very natural. Now on which side of the house is the library? In the south wing? Well, if you will kindly show me there, Johnstone——"

"Certainly, sir."

The library door was closed. As Johnstone was about to open it Winston stayed him.

"Those rooms there?" he said, indicating a corridor leading from the gallery in which they now were. One or two reception rooms and the library opened off this spacious gallery where some works of old masters adorned the walls, and here and there stood groups of exquisite statuary and cabinets of rare curios. But Winston could see that the corridor opening off the end of this gallery led to several smaller rooms.

The butler hesitated.

"Those rooms are not of much interest, sir," he ventured tentatively. Then, regardful

perhaps of Winston's uplifted eyebrows, "of course, sir, if you would like to——"

"Yes; I would." Winston's tone was decisive.

There were three rooms. The further ones did not interest him greatly, but in the room nearest the library Winston lingered. He guessed its owner as soon as he entered, and the butler's answer to his question proved him right.

"It's Master Hawtry's smoke-room, sir."

Winston tried to get a mental impression of the man from his room. It was furnished handsomely in dark leather. The carpet, velvet to the footfall, was Turkish; its tones rich like old wine. The walls for the most part were covered with sporting pictures, good—of their kind; and photographs of actresses were strewn about with the liberality that a woman scatters flowers in her boudoir. Two or three silver cups occupied places of honour; some souvenirs of the field were relegated to odd corners. The well-filled bookcases intrigued Winston's interest. Here were books on aviation; a goodly number of classics; a fair selection of general literature and—medical books. A number of these last, and deeply technical—books for the professional, the student. Near by was a revolving table piled with magazines, sporting papers and medical journals. Some of the later papers were still in their postal wrappers.

"Mr. Le Page is a doctor, I believe?" said



Winston in a casual way, turning round to Johnstone, whose gaze never left him for a moment.

The butler looked puzzled, uncertain.

"He does not practise, sir."

"No?"

"The war broke out and he took up aviation instead."

"I see."

Drawn up within reach of a comfortable lounging chair was a smoker's table. Winston's glance swept this, noting immediately the stub of a cigarette in the ash-tray and a half-burnt match.

As he picked up the cigarette stub he looked at the butler. The man's eyes rounded in a startled stare. His face went grey, grey like ashes. The next moment he had averted his glance with an assumption of indifference. Winston smiled significantly.

"So," he said gently, "the man who left the house by your young master's window smoked one of his cigarettes before he went, eh? Perhaps he likes to fancy that he is the young master? He not only uses his chair and smokes his cigarettes, but is also interested like him in aviation. Is that so, Johnstone?" and Winston laughed as he pointed to an open copy of *Aeroplane* lying on the chair, and the wrapper in the waste-paper basket near by.

"I—I must inquire, sir," said Johnstone. "The young master would blame me——"



“I am perfectly sure he would,” put in Winston drily, “if he thought these things were left lying about.”

He crossed over to the open window, reaching almost to the ground, and looked out. Yes, this was the window right enough through which the man had made his stealthy exit from the house. The windows of the other rooms were not only closed, but, as he had noticed, were locked. For a moment he stood there, gazing across the lawn towards the woods. He was thinking that it might be worth while to find out something more about Hawtry Le Page even though he was supposed to be in America.

## CHAPTER XIII

### IN THE LIBRARY

“ **H**ALLO, young feller! ” exclaimed Mason when Winston was shown in where he and another police-officer were busy sorting papers.

“ You didn’t say you were coming. Why on earth did you not come down with me? ”

Winston shrugged by way of answer and nodded to Matthews.

“ Found anything? ” he asked.

“ Plenty,” returned Mason. “ See those old newspaper cuttings and that bundle of letters? It’s all there.”

“ Jolly lucid that. Perhaps you will tell me what is all there? ”

“ Motive for the murder—everything ; or nearly everything. Listen. I’ll tell you. Clare Ashleigh’s father was Claremont’s twin brother. Got that? ”

Winston nodded.

“ For some reason or other he was in a bank in London. While in charge of some of the bank money he was doped and robbed. The first he knew about it was when he came to himself in a slum in New York. They kept

him doped until he was safely there. Well, he was ill, penniless, and in a strange country. He didn't know what on earth to do. At first he thought he would go to the police and tell his story, but it sounded so improbable that he was scared they wouldn't believe him. As soon as he got a chance to see a newspaper he found there was a warrant out for his arrest ; then he got the wind up——"

"Is that in the newspapers—his thoughts, and fears, and getting the wind up?" questioned Winston blandly.

Mason looked hard at him under his beetling brows.

"Whose leg are you pulling, young feller? Newspapers deal in facts, not feelings."

"Facts!" echoed Winston laughing. "Oh, I say, Mason."

The older man grinned genially.

"Facts as we supply them anyway," he retorted.

"That's better—nearer to the truth. But go on with the story—I'm interested. Just a moment though—where's a match?" and Winston seated himself in the nearest easy chair, lighted a cigarette, and crossed his long legs comfortably.

Mason looked him over and shook his head.

"Huh!" he said. "You wouldn't like a footstool, I suppose? Or may I suggest a little mild refreshment?"

"I can manage without the footstool,



thanks," returned Winston imperturbably. "But the refreshment would be welcome if not too mild."

"Soothing syrup is what you want—you're getting uppish."

Winston laughed.

"I prefer the story. Dish it up—hopes and fears——"

"You'll jolly well have to read it for yourself if you get funny again," Mason told him.

"Where was I? You put me off my stride. Well, he hung round New York for a time doing odd jobs, and managed eventually to get to Trinidad, where he seems to have fallen on his feet. About four years later, when he thinks the hue and cry for him might have died down, he writes to his twin brother—this James Claremont—telling him the story and begging for news of his parents. We get all this from these letters. But, listen to this. According to this newspaper cutting it seems that John Ashleigh Claremont—the young chap in Trinidad—was entirely exonerated about two years after his disappearance from England. It appears that another chap in the bank, who was a gambler, and heavily in debt, was the real offender. He had engineered the whole affair so that the blame would fall on the young chap. Anyway he fell in it himself after all, for he tried something of the kind on the second time and got nabbed. This led to inquiries and, not to make a song about it, he confessed to the first offence also. So now,

young feller-me-lad, you can see where the motive comes in——”

“ I will, perhaps, when you’ve told me,” said Winston.

“ Just you wait. We haven’t got it quite pat yet, but from these letters written at long intervals from John to James, *John never knew that he was cleared of the crime !* ”

Winston Barrows uncrossed his legs and sat up.

“ What ! ” he exclaimed.

“ A bit rough on him, eh ? For some reason James played a double game. Both parents died within a year of each other but not until after the son is cleared. Yet James lets the young chap out there believe that the disgrace killed them, and up till the very end is given to understand that he is still ‘ wanted,’ and that it would be unsafe for him to return to England.”

“ Egad ! ” exclaimed Winston. “ What a venomous blighter James must have been. Claremont Park was the cause of his duplicity, I suppose ? ”

“ True,” agreed the inspector. “ It’s always money or a woman in these cases. They are both the very devil. Anyway, this James made a show of benevolence by offering to lend his brother a few hundred pounds to set him on his feet. It was refused *in toto* by John who seems to have been a decent young chap and as proud as they make ’em. That’s where the girl gets it from. Here’s his letter—read just



there," and Mason handed Winston a letter discoloured with the passage of years.

Winston read aloud from the place indicated.

"Thanks, old chap. It is good of you to offer a few hundreds to give me a start. But I prefer to stand on my own feet. I want nothing from anyone except belief in my innocence, and what would of right be mine were my innocence established."

Winston Barrows gave a low whistle.

"What do you think of that?" asked Mason triumphantly as he took the letter and replaced it carefully with the rest.

"That this James Claremont was not a very pleasant person to have as a brother. Also that he was being meanly generous with money that rightfully belonged to John."

"That's it. Still we have found the motive now——"

"What motive?"

"You are a bit dense to-day, aren't you? Revenge against the man who made her father suffer—during his whole life, mind you—and the girl's claim to the estate as Claremont's next of kin."

Winston Barrows shook his head.

"No good. For one thing, Miss Ashleigh is not revengeful. For another she is only a slip of a girl and would no more be a party to murder than any other ordinary, decent and sane woman. To add to that she knows nothing about her father's affairs, nor even that he had a brother."



“ Oh, come off it,” exclaimed Mason impatiently. “ I used to think you a level-headed young feller ; but if you think that every handsome woman is merely an angel having a look round this planet you’d better quit this job you are on and become a parson.”

Winston Barrows smiled good-humouredly as he lighted another cigarette.

“ I said ‘ ordinary, decent and sane woman,’ ” he said in his quiet way. “ Some women, handsome and otherwise, do these things, but they are abnormal. Any murderer is, man or woman. Hallo, what’s that ! ” and he sprang to his feet.

From the gallery came the sound of a scuffle and a shrill voice crying out : “ I will tell. I—— ” A scream, stifled abruptly, followed, and the slamming of a door.

## CHAPTER XIV

### ELLEN'S STORY

**I**N a moment the three men were out in the gallery.

"You go back, Matthews, and keep an eye on those things," commanded Mason testily over his shoulder as he followed Winston Barrows into the room adjoining the library. A strange sight met their view.

A maidservant was struggling in the grip of Johnstone, that very excellent and dignified butler, who was now wearing an extremely agitated and dishevelled appearance. As the door opened to admit the two men Johnstone loosened his hold with a suddenness that sent the girl staggering, while he stood nervously biting his lip, his eyes seeking to convey a covert threat to the girl. As for her, she would have slipped through the open door had not Mason blocked the way with his great bulk.

"Stay there," he said roughly. "Now what was all that row about?"

"Nothing," broke in Johnstone before the girl could reply. "I was just telling her about the—er—the master, sir, and she screamed."

The inspector's chin thrust out aggressively as he glared at the unfortunate butler.

"When I want you to speak I'll question you," he said. "Your turn will come later. Just now I want—what's your name, my girl? Ellen Stone? Maidservant here? Thought so. Well, Ellen, what is it that you want to tell us? Come, you have nothing to fear," as she cast a deprecating glance at Johnstone, who was standing like a stone image of Misery. "You may be able to help us, you know," he added.

"I told him that," she said. "It was what happened Sunday night, sir."

"Yes?" said Mason encouragingly. "What did happen on Sunday night?"

With another glance, half deprecatory, half defiant, at the butler, Ellen told her story.

"The master was in the library, sir, and, as I was passing to go to the dining-room, I could hear someone talking very angrily to him—the door was ajar, sir."

"I see. Could you hear what was said?"

"Only a little. Johnstone came and sent me away," she added with a little shamefaced laugh.

"You were listening, I suppose?" observed the inspector drily.

"Well, why not?" asked Ellen, with a toss of her head. "The man was threatening my master."

Winston Barrows, who was watching the butler, saw a look of utter hopelessness come



into his face. His shoulders sagged. He was a very troubled old man.

"Threatening your master?" exclaimed the inspector with deepening interest. "What did he say—the exact words?"

"He said—'All right, then, if you still insist, I'll go to Bloomsbury and tell her myself, and she'll never forgive you.' Then the butler comes along and I had to go."

"That was unfortunate. However, since the door was ajar you must have seen the man, eh?"

"N—no. Not exactly."

"What do you mean?" questioned Mason sharply. "You either saw him or you did not."

"I didn't see him properly," said Ellen, pouting in response to the inspector's sharpness. "I didn't see his face, I mean; only his back. He was tall; very tall and straight; and his hair was dark."

"Yes—and what sort of voice had he?"

"He spoke something like them Americans."

Mason shot a quick, triumphant glance at Winston.

"Well, Ellen," he said, "you were quite right to tell us. We won't keep you any longer just now; but I shall want to see you again probably."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Johnstone," exclaimed the inspector harshly as soon as the girl had left the room, "why did you try to keep Ellen from telling us what she had heard?"

"I did not know that she had anything to tell, sir," replied the butler. "I thought she was just inquisitive to see what you were doing."

"Humph! Is that so? Now who was in the study with your master?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You don't know! Think again," snapped the inspector.

"I don't know," repeated Johnstone doggedly. "I just saw Ellen prying through the crack of the door and sent her away."

"You knew someone was with your master?"

"No, sir."

Mason drummed irritably on the back of the chair upon which he was leaning.

"Who was in the house on Sunday night?" he questioned.

"Just the master and the servants. The master dined alone, then went to the library, as was his custom when alone."

"And did no one come to see him?—the truth now." The inspector's tone was significant.

If Johnstone resented this, he permitted no trace of his resentment to be seen. "Not that I know of, sir," he answered respectfully enough. "I took his coffee in after dinner. At ten o'clock I went in again with his whisky and soda, and on both occasions he was alone."

Winston Barrows had been observing the man keenly. His answers appeared to be per-



fectly straightforward. And yet Winston felt certain that the butler not only knew who was with his master on Sunday night, but that he would lie his soul away to prevent that knowledge coming to the police. Why? Who was this person for whom he was willing to run risks? As the man finished speaking, Winston put a question.

"Who was on the door on Sunday night?" he asked.

"Smithson," replied Johnstone promptly.

Mason rang the bell, then told the maid who answered it to call Smithson. But Smithson could throw no light on the subject. He had not opened the door to anyone on Sunday night. And to this statement he adhered. Winston believed him.

"It was hot last Sunday night," observed the latter thoughtfully. "The windows would of course be wide open, eh, Johnstone?"

"Er—perhaps so—I cannot remember."

"You cannot! That is very surprising. Would your master sit with closed windows on such a hot night? I doubt it."

Johnstone became uneasy. He moistened his lips.

"I—I think not, sir," he said.

"Quite so. Now just cast your mind back to Sunday night," advised Winston suavely. "You remember quite well closing those windows before going to bed, don't you?"

"Y—yes; I remember now closing them."

"Thought you would," returned Winston



pleasantly. "Your master's visitor came in that way—quite easy; he left that way also, like the man I saw leaving the house this evening."

There was no mistaking the butler's agitation now. He was white and shaking visibly.

Mason sprang round. "What's that?" he exclaimed. "What man?"

"Oh, someone I saw as I was coming in this evening," returned Winston easily. He had the knowledge he wanted. The man who left the house in that surreptitious manner that evening was the man who was with Claremont on Sunday night—the night before he was murdered—and the butler not only knew who the man was, but had urgent reasons for suppressing that knowledge.

While Mason was plying the butler with question on question, Winston wandered about the room looking at one thing and another. On a small table were two photos, cabinet size, enclosed in handsome frames. One was of an officer in the uniform of the R.A.F., the other of a young officer in the Royal Engineers. The younger man bore a resemblance to Clare Ashleigh. The flying man was quite different. Whereas the Claremonts were all fair, this man was dark. It was a striking face; clever, sardonic. Handsome, some people would call him. Dangerously handsome he would prove to many women. Winston, reading deeper than the casual observer or the woman who became subject to

his influence, was not favourably impressed by the face that seemed to look back at him with a mocking smile. One of those smooth-tongued, over-veneered men, he thought; plausible as butter until crossed; then violent-tempered brutes. Physically, brave enough—with a dashing, devil-may-care kind of bravery; morally—Winston had his doubts.

“ Handsome man, this,” he said, casually, pointing to the photograph. “ Who is it, Johnstone ? ”

“ The young master, sir.”

Winston’s eyes held the old man’s for a brief moment.

“ Hawtry Le Page ? ” he asked.

“ Yes, sir.”

Winston Barrows turned away as if the subject of the photo were of but passing interest. But later, when the butler discovered an empty photo frame, the old man sank helplessly into the nearest chair, and his hands were shaking like the hands of one who suffered with a palsy.

. . . . .

It was late when Winston Barrows arrived at his rooms in Gower Street. The Pup, who was curled up in a big chair sleeping with the perfect abandon of a young animal while he awaited the arrival of his hero, wakened up as the door opened. He blinked sleepily, and rubbed his eyes.

“ Well, Pup—what news ? ” asked Winston.



"That American chap, sir, Mr. Warren P. Elton, 'as left the Russell."

"Thought he would. Where has he gone?"

"Bayswater—'ere's the address," and the Pup held out a grubby piece of torn paper.

Winston glanced at it, then entered the address in his pocket-book.

"Did he go straight to this place, Pup?"

"Not 'e." The Pup was waking up now. As he warmed to the subject his eyes grew bright and glittering like a bird's. "He's a deep 'un, 'e is," he went on. "First 'e took a taxi and drove to Euston Station. Here he 'as 'is luggage taken off and carried inside. Then 'e buys a ticket and goes inside 'imself and waits. Afterwards, when a train come in, his nibs comes out as large as life all mixed up with the passengers and looking quite different."

"What do you mean, Pup? Had he done himself up?"

"Right first time, Gov'nor. He'd been into the waiting-room and done something to his face and put on glasses—them big, round ones like taxi lamps—with black round them."

Winston smiled. "Yes. And what next?"

"Next 'e has 'is luggage carried out and put on a taxi just as if 'e came by the train, and away 'e goes to Bayswater. He didn't know as I was a-watching of 'is doings though."

Winston smiled and for a moment his hand rested on the boy's shoulder.

"Right-o, Pup," he said kindly. "You've



done splendidly. Off to bed now, and in the morning get along to Bayswater. You must not let Mr. Elton give you the slip."

"Slip!" exclaimed the Pup derisively, but wriggling in delight at the word of commendation. "Good night, sir," he added. Then saluting stiffly he took his departure.


## CHAPTER XV

### OUT OF THE PAST

**W**INSTON BARROWS was an early riser and the next morning—Wednesday it was—found him up betimes. He had planned to do quite a number of things that day. To begin with he wished it were possible to see his client, Warren P. Elton. But it was not. As the latter had left the Russell Hotel privily, he could not do so without letting him know that he was being watched. It was essential that he should not know this. Winston would have given much to know if Elton was the man who had failed to keep his luncheon engagement. Of course there was no real reason to suppose Elton was the man, except that the expected visitor was an American who was stopping in London. There was nothing in that. London was full of Americans, any one of whom might be the particular person sought for by the police. For why had this man—whoever he was—neither kept his engagement nor sent an apology? It was suspicious to say the least of it. It looked as though he were aware of what had happened. Yet the identity of the mur-

dered man was not then known. And who was the man who had called on Claremont on Sunday night? Was it Hawtry Le Page? Winston was inclined to think so. Ellen Stone said the man had an American accent. Lizzie Barker said the same about the man who called at Linden House at twenty minutes to four. The fact that Hawtry Le Page was not an American was nothing: he might easily have acquired an accent during his visit to New York. Nothing simpler. The Sunday night visitor spoke of going to Bloomsbury, and his words no doubt had reference to Clare Ashleigh. He was going to tell her something inimical to James Claremont—most probably of the injury he had done her father. If this were so the inference was that this Sunday night visitor was someone so nearly connected with the family as to know its secret history. Would not Hawtry Le Page know more than anyone else?

Winston's first visit that morning was to the fruiterer's in Goodge Street, where Clare had bought her plums on Monday evening. Half an hour later found him driving up Chancery Lane in a taxi. Seated beside him was a rather pretty girl whose manner to a close observer would have betrayed a certain eager excitement. The taxi drew up opposite Harper and Braddell's offices; but neither the pretty girl nor Winston alighted. Winston leaned back in the shadow of the taxi. The girl gazed earnestly down the street.





"You are sure, Miss Allen," said Winston, "that you understand what is required? I want you to watch everyone who goes in, or comes out, of that place opposite, and if you see anyone you recognise, tell me—right?"

The girl nodded. "I quite understand, Mr. Barrows."

People passed up and down the street. Several persons entered Harper and Braddell's, but the girl gave no sign of recognition. A quarter of an hour passed. Winston looked at his watch and frowned. Then the girl uttered an exclamation.

"I have seen that young lady before," she said, indicating a tall, well-poised girl who was coming down the street. She was dressed entirely in pale grey, even to the small, close-fitting hat, the shoes, and silk stockings. The bag she carried was of the same shade of dove grey. As Winston had expected, it was Clare Ashleigh.

"Drive on," he said to the driver, then turning to his companion: "Tell me where you have seen that lady before."

"In the Pavilion Tea-Room," replied the girl promptly. "She has come there for tea two or three times after the show."

"When did you see her last?"

The girl thought for a moment. "Oh, yes; I remember now," she replied. "It was on Monday afternoon—the day before yesterday. She bought some cakes to take away with her."

"You are certain it was she?"

The girl gave an amused laugh. "Oh, quite," she answered still smiling. "She is not the kind of girl one could easily make a mistake about. She is an uncommon type and carries herself so well. Besides we girls at the tea-room have often discussed her amongst ourselves. We get to know the regular customers by sight. Frankly I'd give a lot to be able to walk as she does and to be able to wear my clothes like that."

Winston smiled. "How was she dressed on Monday?" he asked.

"In that turn-out she has on to-day. It was the first time that we had seen her in it——" She suddenly broke off and an expression of anxiety shot into her face. "I never thought—oh, I do hope my recognition of her is not going to do her harm. I wouldn't like to hurt her——"

"On the contrary," Winston assured her; "you have helped the young lady."

"I am glad of that."

It was about half-past eleven when Winston went to Linden House. Clare had just returned from the lawyers'.

"I have the papers," she said as she returned Winston's greeting. "But I have not had a chance to look through them yet. Shall I do so now?"

"Yes; if you will; though I fancy that I can make a good guess at their contents—in some measure, anyway." Then in answer to her surprised interrogation he told her what



he had learnt with regard to James Claremont and her father.

She sat back and gazed at him in consternation. Her lips were trembling ; her eyes dark with pain. The package fell unheeded to the floor.

“ *Theft!* My—my father ! ” she said slowly, almost as if she were endeavouring to comprehend the inapprehensible ; something too monstrous for belief. “ And you really mean to tell me,” she went on in the same incredulous voice, “ that he never knew that he was cleared—that his innocence was proved ? ”

Winston Barrows inclined his head. “ Yes,” he said. “ That seems to have been the case.”

“ But—but—oh, it seems unbelievable that he carried that burden all his life—my *father!* It is too horrible.” Then as the knowledge of what those long, burden-filled years must have meant to the proud, sensitive man who had been father, comrade, and everything to her, her manner changed. Her young, lithe body stiffened, her face flushed with anger. “ How dared anyone—how could anyone with a grain of sense ever think him capable of dishonesty ? ” she exclaimed indignantly ; “ he who was the soul of honour, the finest and whitest man I’ve ever known. *He* to be accounted a thief ! If you had only known him, Mr. Barrows, you would understand what that must have meant to him—*years* of it. Now I understand why he never came home, though I know he longed and longed to do so—an exile ! ” She sank



back suddenly in her chair, relaxed, white, overcome by her emotion. "Oh, *Daddy!*—and I never knew." The words came as a wail of agony and Clare buried her face in her hands.

Winston Barrows waited a moment then leaned forward and laid his hand gently on the girl's bowed head. Detective though he was he was deeply moved by her bitter distress. She had carried herself proudly and aloof in a situation terrible enough to dismay the strongest, fraught as it was with desperate potentialities. No one could face a murder charge with equanimity. Yet this girl, whatever had been her feelings, had kept them under control. But the thought of her father's long martyrdom broke her down completely.

"Although your father did not know," Winston reminded her, "he was cleared in the eyes of the world. No stigma rested upon him; his innocence was established——"

"Yes, and that man—my *uncle!*"—Oh, the scorn in the young voice!—"kept that knowledge from him; let him think the world adjudged him a criminal—a common thief!—let him suffer year after year; wrecked his whole life. How could he do it—his own brother! Why did he do it?" she questioned as a sudden thought struck her. "Why? There must have been a reason—a strong reason. And why did he come to see me, and how did he know where to find me?"

"To these questions we have yet to find the answers," Winston told her, "though I have

no doubt your uncle was in possession of property that rightfully belonged to your father. However, I am hoping that your papers will tell us what we want to know." He picked up the packet from the floor where it had fallen and handed it to her.

With trembling fingers Clare opened this message from the dead, from the father who had shielded her so carefully from any share in the burden that had ruined his own life and kept him an exile from his native land. She felt that he was very near unto her as she opened the letter penned after much deliberation and thought for his daughter's future.

The letter told the story of John Claremont's youth. He had never known who robbed him. He had been knocked senseless and drugged—that was the extent of his knowledge. He must have been kept under the influence of drugs for several days, long enough to get him across the Atlantic. He retained dim recollections of dreams and struggles, and dreams again. When he finally came to his senses it was to find that he had been dumped down in the slums of New York. The money entrusted to his charge had been stolen. Even his clothes had been exchanged for others—old things.

Being little more than a lad he had feared to go to the authorities lest they discredited his story. From the newspapers he learned that there was a warrant out for his arrest. He could see from the accounts that his guilt



was unquestioned, and realised that it would be difficult, nay, wellnigh impossible, to prove his innocence. He thought of his parents, of their shame if their son had to stand his trial for theft ; and later, if he was convicted, how would they bear up under the disgrace ? It was bad enough for them as it was ; for him to be convicted—their son a felon!—would be a thousand times worse. Had he any inkling at all as to the identity of the real thief—or thieves—there might have been some hope for him. But the whole affair had been managed with such cleverness, such attention to detail, that he had nothing at all with which to establish his innocence, but a wild and improbable story. For his parents' sake it would be better were he to drop out of their lives altogether.

“ Youth is over fond of a pose,” so he wrote, “ especially the pose of voluntary martyrdom. This pose if reduced to fundamentals is composed—nine times out of ten—of self-conceit, self-gratification and lack of faith. Looking back I realise that this pose of voluntary martyrdom was a weighty factor in forming my decision ; for underlying it was a certain element of gratification in being such ‘ a good chap ’—a bit of a hero, you know, in the effacement of myself and my wrongs for the well-being of my parents. Scarcely recognised at the time—nothing so crude as that I grant you. In fact had this been put to me in so many words I would have resented it as being



untrue ; with such facility do we deceive ourselves. To deceive ourselves regarding the purity of our motives is so simple that we do it every day.

“ You will wonder perhaps, Clare, why I dwell on this psychological aspect of my decision. It is because my more mature judgment bitterly regretted this decision of youth. I realised, when too late, that I should have communicated with my parents and with the authorities immediately, and if necessary, have stood my trial. My parents would have believed my word even if others did not, and my riper judgment informed me that, not only did I wrong them by my lack of faith in their parental affection and understanding, but that they could have borne better a wrongful conviction and the disgrace entailed, than the knowledge that I had lost my honour. Moreover I have a strong conviction that had I stood up to fate and faced the consequences my innocence would have been proved long ago.

“ My little daughter, when you read this letter I shall have passed on, but from the fruit of my own experience I would say this to you for your guidance through life—Never juggle with truth. Do the straight thing, at once, without question, whatever the cost ; then, my daughter, face whatever comes. The knowledge of a clear conscience will be strength in itself. Be honest with yourself. Truth first, last, and all the time, and you will not go far wrong.”

Clare read thus far then put the letter down on her lap and looked thoughtfully at Winston Barrows. She seemed to hear her father's voice speaking to her—"Never juggle with the truth."

"Had I read this letter before," she said softly, "I must have told Inspector Mason that Warren Elton was with me on Monday."

"Ah!" Winston's tone expressed interest. "In that case I fear that Elton would have been under arrest that same night."

"I know. I saw that at once. And it seemed mean—not cricket, you know—to drag him in when he had nothing to do with it." She appeared to be thinking aloud; thinking out the ethics of her action, and giving voice to her thoughts as they arose in her mind. "All the same," she continued, frowning at the remembrance, "there is no getting away from the fact that I lied. I hated doing it. When Inspector Mason looked at me I could not meet his gaze. I felt lowered; soiled—you understand?" Winston nodded. "Yet," she went on thoughtfully, thinking aloud, "yet it seemed right at the time and," she gave a half-hearted laugh—"I really am glad that I did——"

Winston Barrows shook his head.

"You immediately brought suspicion upon yourself, Miss Ashleigh, for the sake of a stranger, and——" here he spoke with intended deliberateness, "for all you know he may be the man we want."



She looked at him, startled. "You know that he is not," she flashed.

"I do not know anything of the kind," he retorted. "At present I do not know who did it. But I do know that you took a tremendous risk, an unjustifiable risk, in the circumstances."

Clare picked up the letter and straightened out its folds. Then she put it down again and rested her hands upon it.

"You look at it from a man's point of view," she reminded him. Her tone was wistful.

Winston Barrows' smile was a little grim.

"Naturally," he replied. "And—from the police point of view."

Clare gave a little sigh and took up the letter again.

"My father," she said softly, "would agree with you."

"Ah!"

"He says—but, no. I will just finish the letter and you can read it for yourself."

"Are you sure that you would like me to—your father's letter? You could just tell me what it is necessary that I should know," he suggested gently.

For a moment her eyes dwelt searchingly upon the strong, quiet face of the man before her.

"I would like you to read it, Mr. Barrows," she said. "You will then understand."

After his short digression, John Claremont took up his story again, dwelling lightly on



the year spent in New York, of his struggles at first to obtain adequate food and shelter, and later, in Trinidad, to obtain a sure footing in the business world. It was four years after the calamity which had changed the whole current of his life that he first wrote to his brother. He craved news of his parents, and news with regard to the robbery of the bank's money. Had the truth transpired? If not, would James advise his return to England even at that late day to take his chance of proving his innocence. James had replied by return mail. Their parents were dead, he wrote, their end hastened by the disgrace that had befallen their house. He had professed a half-hearted belief in his brother's innocence; but so lacking in cordiality was the tone as to be tantamount to a direct denial. Clare, reading between the lines, understood how his dubitation had hurt her father. That his own flesh and blood—his twin brother above all—should doubt his word and deem him capable of theft had been bitter indeed; twice bitter because unexpected.

As regards John's return to England, James had been unpleasantly explicit. On no account must he take such a disastrous step, disastrous not only to himself, but to James also. The robbery was not forgotten. John would be arrested immediately he set foot in England. James did not mince matters. Enough misfortune had befallen the family already, so he said. It had taken him all his time to live down

the disgrace and he did not want a resurrection of the unhappy affair. Of course it was rough luck on John ; but it was his kismet. Coming to England meant arrest, trial, and, of a certainty, conviction. Let him stay in Trinidad where he was unknown as John Claremont ; where he was free to form new ties and to build up a new life for himself. James, with the restricted magnanimity intrinsically his own, offered to give John a few hundred pounds—out of his many thousands—as a foundation on which to build this new life. John, righteously proud and indignant, had refused this offer in terms which effectively precluded its renewal. What he wanted was unqualified belief in his integrity.

Clare's father then went on to explain that he, as the elder twin, should by right have inherited Claremont Park. A smaller estate in Herefordshire was the portion of the younger son. According to James, however, their father had made a fresh will leaving everything to him, the younger son. John's name was not even mentioned. This had been news indeed to John, who had always been under the impression that Claremont Park was entailed.

It had been John's own wish to enter the bank. He wanted the business training that banking would give him before taking over the management of the estates from his father. This very training, in the getting of which he had been deprived of that for which it was



needed, had stood him in good stead when thrown upon his own resources. He had risen to be senior partner in a stable firm of accountants.

Throughout the years the brothers had carried on an irregular correspondence. John, with a view to his daughter's claims, had never permitted the correspondence to lapse. When his brother's only son was killed in France, Clare became the rightful heir to her grandfather's estates. John had put this fact before his brother who, although giving no definite promise, had nevertheless encouraged the hope that one day she would come into the Claremont inheritance. But her father feared the influence of Hawtry Le Page, who had been brought up as a son of the house. This stepson had no legitimate claim to inherit. He was not a Claremont at all, but the son of James's wife by her first husband. However—as was only natural—his brother seemed fond of Hawtry Le Page and might be influenced to make him his heir—provided it was in James's power to will away the estates.

Now, as John wrote, this was just the point and the reason for this letter to his daughter. It was his conviction that her grandfather had not cut off the entail. He was a just man; not given to acting hastily. He would need to be very certain of his elder son's guilt before depriving him of his rightful inheritance; and John knew, none better, of the fine spirit of *camaraderie* that had ever existed between



them. No adverse wind had ever arisen to mar the placid surface of their deep affection for, and faith in, each other. His father would not readily believe in his son's guilt. Moreover he knew that, placed as John was as heir to great wealth, there was entire lack of motive on his part for the theft. Had he been in temporary difficulties, well, his father had always been approachable. Besides, John's life had been open enough ; his tastes simple. Of course there was James, the younger by but half an hour. But, as her father pointed out to Clare, there had been passages in his brother's life which had caused their father much anxiety. So much so, that he would not be in haste to put him in undisputed possession of the Claremont inheritance.

Somehow, with the passing of the years there had grown up in John's mind the conviction of duplicity on his brother's part ; that James's lien on the Claremont inheritance would be annulled if John, or his heirs, put in a claim. So strong had been this belief that he had only been restrained from looking into the matter by the fear of bringing disgrace upon his daughter ; knowing that no wealth would make up to Clare for her father being a convicted felon.

There was, so he wrote, the probability of his brother sending for Clare. If he had not done so before her twenty-first birthday it was her father's desire that she consult Messrs. Harper and Braddell, his father's solicitors.

They would know how matters stood. He enclosed a letter to them with full instructions. The birth and marriage certificates would establish her identity.

When she had finished reading the letter Clare handed it to Winston Barrows. While he was reading it she sat wrapped in thought, thinking of her father's wrecked life. No, she told herself, no life so noble as his had failed of fulfilment. He had borne the stigma of a crime of which he was innocent, but, as he himself said, innocence was a source of strength in itself. He had been an alien from his native land ; had missed the wealth and great position in the world that were rightfully his. But wealth and position were not everything. Her father had been an outstanding figure for the nobility of his life and character. Would this have been so to the extent that it was if he had not been forced to face the deeper issues of life. Innocence was a source of strength ; but suffering was a ladder by which men scaled the heavenly heights. Her father had ever walked hand in hand with sorrow. Even his wife whom he had loved as few men love, had died within two years of their marriage. Clare knew that her loss was an abiding sorrow throughout his whole life. Much had been taken from him ; but the process had been the means of building up the fine sterling character that had won for him the respect and affection of men whose esteem was worth having. No ; his life had not been wrecked ;



it had achieved its purpose. But Clare found herself wishing that her father had told her his story during his lifetime so that she could have made up to him in every possible way.

Winston Barrows read the letter through, turning back and reading some parts twice over.

"I think," he said when he had finished, "I think this letter throws light on your uncle's visit to you. He wanted to make your acquaintance, possibly with a view to making you his heiress."

"Do you think," exclaimed Clare indignantly, "that I would have had anything to do with him—the man who could act so towards my father?"

"That is not the point," he reminded her as he gave her back the letter. "We now know why your uncle came to see you—that is something gained. Has the lawyer in Trinidad this address?"

"Yes. I wrote to him immediately after coming here. I had forgotten. Mr. Murdock told me that, according to father's instructions if anything happened to him, he had notified a friend of my father's in England of his death, and would keep this friend informed of my movements. It had quite slipped my memory. I did not take much notice at the time—you see he told me just after father's death. How much Mr. Murdock knows I have no idea; but he did know there was a likelihood of my receiving an invitation to England, and was



disappointed that no word had come before I left Trinidad. He made me promise to write and tell him what transpired after I received the packet from the lawyers here, and if I was in any difficulty I was to cable him immediately. So you see," she added, "my uncle evidently got my address from Mr. Murdock."

"Yes, that certainly explains it," observed Winston musingly. "Your father seems to have acted with much forethought, Miss Ashleigh. He left nothing to chance."

Clare nodded and smiled—a wistful smile it was.

"That is an indication of father's character," she told him. "He was careful over details. Whatever he did he did it as perfectly as possible ; and"—her hands closed tightly on the letter in her lap—"he was so dear and thoughtful for me—always."

"I am sure he was," returned Winston with quick sympathy. In truth Clare Ashleigh made a strong appeal to his sympathies. He knew just what she was up against now that Mason's suspicions of her were aroused. The inspector was like a bulldog. Once he got his grip he held on. It was wellnigh impossible to divert his attention towards another quarry. And against this was her youth ; her position of peculiar loneliness ; her proud, reserved nature, capable of profound feeling, of intense suffering, which would face sorrow and adversity in silence. Winston Barrows was glad for Clare's sake that he had taken up this case ; for not

only did she stand in need of someone working on her behalf, but it was possible that he might be able to shield her from the immediate unpleasant results of Mason's hasty conclusions.

"Now, there is one other matter, Miss Ashleigh," he said with a complete change of tone. "Have you ever met the original of this?" and he took from his pocket a photograph and passed it to her.

She looked at it and immediately her eyes opened wide in surprise. "Of course I do," she exclaimed. "It is Hawtry Le Page. Wherever did you get this?"

"Will you tell me where you met him?" he inquired, passing over her question.

"In Trinidad. He was there when I sailed for England."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Certain?" echoed Clare, wondering what he meant. "Of course I am certain. I danced with him at the Queen's Park Hotel the night before I left."

"I—see," said Winston slowly. Then: "When did you sail, Miss Ashleigh—what date?"

She told him.

"That means that you have been in England about——"

"About two months."

"About two months—hum!" For a moment Winston sat stroking his chin, thinking, working out the time at Le Page's



disposal—Yes, of course he could do it. “Have you seen him since?” he asked Clare.

Her expression was one of astonishment.

“Of course not. Why, is he in England?” she asked.

Winston Barrows did not reply. His glance became one of keen scrutiny. Then he spoke. “Was it in this letter,” he questioned, indicating the letter on her lap, “that you had your first intimation that Hawtry Le Page was connected with your family?”

“Of course. The name surprised me when I read it just now. I don’t think that he could have known either.”

Winston laughed sceptically. He was not so sure of that.

“Miss Ashleigh,” he said with some crispness: “I am going to ask you a very personal question which I hope you will answer. Did Le Page ask you to marry him?”

Clare flushed painfully and hesitated.

“It is an important matter, otherwise I would not have put the question to you.”

“I am sure of that, Mr. Barrows,” she replied quickly. “Yes; he did ask me to marry him, and I refused his offer.”

“Ah! Now about to-morrow—are you remaining on here after the inquest?”

“Oh, no,” returned Clare with decision. “Mr. Scott gave me to understand that I remained here until then on sufferance. And I shall be glad to leave.”

“Naturally. But I thought that Scott might



be nasty, so am giving you this address." He handed her a slip of paper. "It is in Gower Street, and I think you will be quite comfortable there for the present—at any rate until things are settled. I have known Mrs. Henderson for some years. She is a kind, motherly old soul, and will look after your comfort. Let me know if you decide to go there."

Clare thanked him. "I will go there this afternoon and see the rooms," she said gratefully.

## CHAPTER XVI

### SEEN THROUGH THE OPEN WINDOW

**A**FTER Clare had gone downstairs Winston Barrows sat on in the attic sitting-room smoking cigarettes and turning over in his mind what Clare had just told him.

Hawtry Le Page—so ran his thoughts—had evidently discovered that Claremont had a brother and niece, also that the niece was the rightful heir. This latter fact had sent Le Page to Trinidad in order to win her for his wife while she was yet in ignorance of her rightful name and heritage. So much seemed clear enough. Had his plans been successful, Hawtry Le Page, as Clare's husband, would have been the virtual owner of the Claremont inheritance. But he had failed—Clare had refused to marry him. What then?

If Le Page was the Sunday night visitor in the library—and Winston felt convinced that he was—what did he mean when he said: "If you still insist I'll go to Bloomsbury and tell her myself"? Was he urging Claremont not to rake up the past, but to let matters remain as they were, that is, to let Clare remain in



ignorance of her true estate? If she knew nothing she could make no claim. (Of John Claremont's letter to his daughter, Le Page would, of course, know nothing.) "If you still insist. . . . I'll tell her myself. . . . She will never forgive you." Insist on what? Insist on "telling"? Or did the word "silence" fit in there? "If you still insist on maintaining silence"? It was just possible that this was the meaning, though Winston did not believe it to be so. The question was, what would be the position of Hawtry Le Page with regard to the inheritance were Clare kept in ignorance of the truth? If it was to his advantage, then, here was the motive for the murder. Claremont's death had been accomplished before he could make the truth known. Winston would be in a better position to settle this question once he learnt the contents of James Claremont's will, also the conditions under which the latter had inherited.

Mason was working on the assumption that the American who spoke to Clare in the Corner House was Claremont's visitor on Sunday night, and Clare's companion on Monday evening—in fact, the man she was shielding. Winston was certain that the Sunday night visitor was Hawtry Le Page. The butler's agitation went to prove that. Johnstone would naturally be greatly attached to the man he had seen grow up from childhood. But why did he manifest such fear? Was it lest the fact became known that Le Page was in

England when he was supposed to be in New York? The circumstances were certainly suspicious; for why should Le Page not come forward openly unless he had good cause to keep his presence in England secret? And herein—as Winston knew—lay the cause of Johnstone's terror—the old butler believed his young master to be the murderer of James Claremont.

Winston lit another cigarette, then arose and went over to the window where he stood looking down into the garden of the Square, on to the dust-laden trees and shrubs, the withered grass, and plants wilting for lack of moisture. He wondered when the heat spell would break. This was now the fifth day, and there was no promise of rain; it seemed as far off as ever. His glance sought the houses across the Square. He could see into the attic room immediately opposite. Not very clearly, for it was some distance. But the window was wide open, and he could see a woman sitting there. She was sewing. Perhaps his intent gaze drew hers, for at that moment she looked up from her work and turned her gaze on Winston. An idea was born to him. That woman—did she often occupy that position in front of the open window? If so, had she seen anything that occurred here on Monday afternoon? Whoever had been in this room that afternoon had moved the window up and down and, according to Annie Long, made a noise in so doing.



The woman was sewing again now. Her glance across had been but a momentary one. As the rope was broken the window was propped open with a short piece of wood. A longer piece of wood lay on the sill outside—to be used when the window needed to be opened wider. What an annoyance that must have been to Clare, thought Winston. That was the worst of these boarding-houses. If anything went wrong, it had to remain that way, and the boarder had to put up with the inconvenience.

With a shrug of his shoulders as a tribute to the discomfort of boarding-houses in general, and this window in particular, Winston took his cigarette from his lips and tossed it down into the street below. Then, carefully removing the short piece of wood, he opened the window wider and substituted the larger piece. The window was old. It made a rough, grating sound. Immediately the woman in the house opposite looked across and kept her gaze on Winston until his self-constituted task was accomplished.

With a complacent smile he turned and, leaning against the framework of the window, he lit another cigarette and began to reconstruct the crime.

The murderer was probably still near the window when Claremont arrived; the table with the curios and the kris would in that case be close to his hand. Supposing Le Page to be the murderer. He had been waiting to see

Clare since twenty minutes to four with the determination to try his fate again. If he could only win her consent to an engagement before she met her uncle all would be well. Clare, however, fails to put in an appearance, but Claremont arrives. Evidently Le Page had not expected Claremont to visit his niece quite so soon—after a few days perhaps. He is taken aback. He sees his hopes scattered like dust before the wind. Hence his exclamation: "*You!*—Oh, my God!" Now Claremont turns to leave the room—no doubt to make inquiries about Clare—and Le Page in a sudden passion of rage snatches up the kris which is ready to his hand and stabs Claremont in the back. The crime was unpremeditated and followed possibly by speedy remorse, certainly by fear and the exigency for self-preservation. He must delay the finding of the body as long as possible. The sitting-room offers no concealment. The room opening off it must be Clare's bedroom. Carefully he opens the door. His surmise is correct, and the room is empty as he had expected it to be. Le Page is a strong, powerful man. In a moment he has carried the body of his victim there and had disposed of it behind the screen. Not only had he retained his wits sufficiently to accomplish this, but he had meticulously wiped the handle of the kris to remove his finger-marks before making his escape from the house unseen. So far so good. His one object after that would be to leave the country at the first



possible moment and to preserve secret the fact that he had ever returned to it.

Thus Winston Barrows reconstructed the crime, visualising each detail as he imagined it might have been enacted. At length he crossed over to the centre table where he jabbed the stub of his cigarette in an ash-tray. He must see Lizzie Barker, and, yes, he must certainly find out from the passenger lists if Le Page had come to England.

To Lizzie Barker he showed the photograph that he had shown Clare.

"Have you seen this man before, Lizzie," he asked.

She looked at it for a moment in a puzzled way. "I seem to remember that face, sir," she said slowly. "I've seen it somewhere—lately too. Oh, blimey, what a ninny I am!" and the light of recognition flashed into her dust-besmeared face. "He's like that gent who called to see Miss Ashleigh on Monday." She held the photo away from her, looking at it first from one angle, then from another. "The gent who came here was in civies, and he was older than this chap; but he was awfully like him. Is it the same man, sir?"

"If you are not sure, how can you expect me to be, Lizzie?" he parried gently. "I did not see him on Monday, you know."

"Well, he looks like the same gent to me. Did he do the murder, sir?" and Lizzie was all agog with excitement at the thought of having shown in a murderer.

Winston laughed. "Tut, tut!" he admonished her. "You leap ahead far too quickly. You don't give anyone a chance."

On his way downstairs Winston tapped at Clare's door. It was opened immediately.

"I'm sorry to be such a nuisance, Miss Ashleigh," he said apologetically; "but I want you to tell me if the window in your sitting-room was open or not when you went out on Monday afternoon—can you remember?"

"I remember very well," she replied with a quick smile. "It was open. I never close it except when it rains. The rope is broken and it is a bother to open and close it. I had to prop it up with a piece of wood."

"Too bad. You should have told Scott."

"I did. But in a place like this you might expect the earth to move out of its orbit as to get anything done."

He nodded in agreement. "True. Well I am glad you need not be here much longer."

As Winston was passing out he decided to have a few words with Scott. Scott's office was on the ground floor at the back of the house. He was engaged with accounts when Winston looked in upon him.

"Busy, Scott? Sorry. I won't detain you more than a few minutes. Tell me what reason you have for thinking that Miss Ashleigh was in her room Monday afternoon?"

Scott turned half round in his swivel chair.

"I'm just getting the bills out," he



explained. "This terrible tragedy has put everything back. Miss Ashleigh? I don't know that she was in her room, Mr. Barrows. Mason asked me about it, and I said that I supposed she was in since I had not seen her go out. But she might have gone out and come in again without my knowledge any time after half-past three. The fact is I was seated at my desk until that time, and, as you can see for yourself, the staircase comes under my observation. I am in the habit of noticing anyone passing up and down—it saves trouble when visitors call."

"Quite so. I understand that perfectly. And you did not see Miss Ashleigh go out?"

"No."

Winston thought for a moment. "From what time were you in this room, Scott?" he asked.

Scott appeared to consider. "Half-past one I should think—or very soon after that time," he replied.

Winston Barrows half turned and his glance wandered from Scott to the staircase seen through the open door.

"Then if you were seated here," he observed musingly, "you must have been aware of any stranger coming in?"

Scott smiled. "Certainly," he replied, "had anyone come in while I was here. But about half-past three I went to my room to lie down for an hour or so. In a place like this one is kept up late at night—I never go to bed until

everyone is in—so I get in a rest in the afternoon whenever possible. Yesterday I slept until close on five.”

“I see,” observed Winston thoughtfully. “By the way; have you ever seen this man here?” and he handed Scott the photograph of Hawtry Le Page.

Scott looked at the picture intently, then shook his head.

“Can’t say that I have. It is a face one would remember.”

“Quite so. Hallo! that is surely Galloway?” and Winston went close up to a large group photograph hanging on the wall to get a better view. “Do you know Galloway, Scott?”

The man flung out his hands with a scornful gesture.

“I know him by repute,” he returned. “Who doesn’t? But he’s too big a man to know anyone in my position—except professionally,” he added captiously.

“Who is this next him?”

“I don’t know any of them except that end chap, Adams.”

Winston made no comment. He was still gazing intently at the group. A minute later he turned away.

“Well, I must not detain you, Scott,” he said. “You will be thankful when you see the last of us.”

Scott smiled grimly.

“I won’t deny it,” he replied. “It’s just



my rotten luck that this dreadful thing should happen here. I've already had notice from two of my boarders. People don't care to live where there has been a murder."

"Oh, come, cheer up, man. It is rough luck; but these things soon get forgotten. People are too busy thinking of their own affairs. Besides there is always some new sensation to replace the one before."

On leaving Linden House, Winston Barrows walked down the Square towards the British Museum, but on arriving parallel with the end of the enclosed garden, he crossed the road and proceeded up the opposite side of the Square. His objective was the house where he had seen the woman sewing.

After a few words with the landlady he was shown upstairs. The owner of the front attic room proved to be one of those women who have little other than their neighbours' affairs to occupy their time and interest. From the vantage-ground of her window she viewed as much of the Square's doings as was possible. At the termination of his interview with her, Winston Barrows came to the conclusion that even a quidnunc can have her uses occasionally.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A BLOW IN THE DARK

**I**MMEDIATELY on his return to Gower Street, Winston Barrows rang up one of London's busiest men and made an appointment with him for ten o'clock that night. Before partaking of an overdue lunch he occupied himself with some fine powder and some excellent finger-prints that he had obtained that morning. That finished to his entire satisfaction he gave heed to the maid's admonition: "Your lunch is getting spoilt, sir." But his mind was preoccupied—to use the maid's expression to the landlady on her return to the kitchen in the basement, "He might just as well 'ave been eating straw like an ox for all he knew what he was eating of."

Soon after lunch found Winston on his way to St. Clement Danes, where he had a chat with the caretaker. From there he proceeded to Scotland Yard, where he saw the fingerprint specialist. He was just leaving the Yard when he ran across Mason, who greeted him with a jubilant grin.

"Well, young feller-me-lad," he exclaimed



in high good humour ; “ are you still endeavouring to keep the flag of innocence waving over the head of the fair lady ? ”

Winston smiled. “ Mason,” he said, “ you grow more impossible every day.”

“ Touched you on the raw, eh ? ”

“ Not a bit of it, you old blighter,” retorted Winston, laughing. “ The flag continues to wave merrily in the sunlight.”

The inspector stared at him ; then shook his head compassionately. “ You know you really interest me, young feller,” he remarked with facetious humour, the while he thrust a prodding forefinger at Winston’s chest ; “ you do really. You’ve such a nice, childlike faith in human nature. But take a tip from one who knows it from A to Z, and put not your faith in dainty ladies with pretty manners. The softer spoken they are, the harder they can lie. Clare Ashleigh——”

“ Was not in her room on Monday afternoon,” put in Winston quietly. “ I can prove it. She was in the Marble Arch Pavilion. She was one of the earliest arrivals. The girl who showed her in knows her quite well by sight, as each time she has gone there it has been on a Monday and she has gone early. It appears she has her lunch at the Pavilion restaurant first—she did so on Monday. Fortunately for her she is striking-looking, therefore easily remembered. The girl on duty was able to point out where she sat ; this coincided with Miss Ashleigh’s descrip-

tion of her seat. A waitress in the tea-room can swear to serving her with tea after the show. To crown proof on proof the woman in the fruiterer's in Goodge Street remembers selling her some plums shortly before six o'clock, one of which plums I found on the floor. So, my clever student of human nature, you can eliminate Miss Ashleigh from the story."

Mason was nonplussed and showed it. He lifted his hat and ran his fingers through his greying hair with a worried air.

"You're sure of all this?" he asked.

"Certain."

"Humph! Then if that's so why the dickens did she lie and say that she was alone after she came home?"

"You said she lied when she told you that she was at the Pavilion," Winston reminded him suavely.

Mason glared at him, then shrugged his shoulders while a smile spread slowly over his rough-hewn features.

"Huh!" he said. "I see. All right, young feller-me-lad. But you can haul down the flag all the same. Miss Ashleigh——" He paused, looked at his watch, then pointed over his shoulder. "What about going inside? We can't stand here for ever. I've something to tell you. You're not in a hurry? No, thought not. Then come along in with me." And Mason led the way back into the building. When they were comfortably seated he leaned



forward, prodding Winston on the knee to add emphasis to his words.

"Now see here," he began; "Miss Ashleigh may not have been on the spot, but she knows who murdered Claremont and—so do I. If you would like to know his name I'll tell you. It is Warren P. Elton, of New York. He is the man who called on Miss Ashleigh at twenty minutes to four—the man with an American accent. He is the man who was with her in the Corner House; the man who was with Claremont on Sunday night in the library, and the man who had a luncheon engagement with him on Tuesday, which engagement he failed to keep. Because why? Because he knew his man was a corpse and wouldn't be needing any lunch. And that's that!"

"You are quite sure he was the man who had the luncheon engagement, or is it merely surmise on your part?"

"Surmise, eh?" and Mason's chin squared pugnaciously. "We got it straight off Claremont's blotting paper—used a mirror. He addressed a letter to Warren P. Elton, Russell Hotel, and there was half the word luncheon quite distinct, and part of the word Tuesday. That's good enough for me."

"Hum!" It was a thoughtful "hum," that.

The inspector leaned back in his chair and guffawed.

"I thought you would be 'humming'

before long," he giped. "Now why did Elton murder Claremont? Firstly because he's in love with Clare Ashleigh, who has a pretty big grudge against her nice, kind uncle. She happens to be James Claremont's sole heiress, by the way. I saw the will this morning. The Claremont estates are entailed it appears, and as the sole representative of the family, Clare Ashleigh comes in for the lot; lock, stock and barrel. Secondly, this Elton's father is the millionaire Elton, the head, tail, and body of the Elton Motor Company. It seems that Elton, the father, not content with being a multi-millionaire, is anxious to get his cars on the English market. He wants to build a factory here and to flood the English market with them. Things were moving merrily to this end when suddenly there is a block. To cut a long story short, James Claremont was the block. Goodness knows there is a big enough income with Claremont for any man—thousands a year. But Claremont—like Elton and all the other millionaires—wanted more. Maybe he was providing against the time when he would be forced to render an account of his stewardship."

"His stewardship—what do you mean?"

"The whole thing is complicated," returned Mason, who was enjoying himself; he always loved to tell a story to a good listener. "According to the will of John Claremont, the father of these twin brothers, James merely held the Claremont estates in



trust until John's return. John was the elder twin and, had he returned to England, James would have had to hand over to him Claremont and I don't know how many thousands a year, while his share would have been the smaller property in Herefordshire. Here, of course, we get James's motive for keeping his brother out of England—he was in possession, and was determined to remain in possession."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Winston. "And he had the cheek to offer John a few hundreds of his own. Generous blighter, what!"

The inspector nodded in agreement. "He jolly well asked for trouble, and he got it. But this is where Elton comes in. Claremont seems to have had a flair for business. He had controlling shares in two or three concerns; was a director of this, that, and the other. But it seems that the Blue Arrow Car Company belonged to him. That being so, it was not to his interest to have Elton flood the English market with his American cars. So Claremont sent his agent over to New York to buy up all the Elton shares he could lay hands on, and to get control of as many votes as possible. When Elton bumped up against an altogether unforeseen block, matters were looked into, and he found that parcels of shares here, there, and everywhere, were all controlled by a man named MacNab, who was really agent for James Claremont. So Elton sends his son over here to find out the why

and wherefore, and to remove the block. He has removed it by removing Claremont. See?"

Winston made no reply. He was thinking over what he had just heard. The inspector regarded him curiously for a moment, then brought his clenched hand down heavily on the arm of his chair.

"Hear this," he said, his voice grating with harshness; "millionaire or no, Warren P. Elton is going to stand his trial for the murder of James Claremont, and the girl will stand hers for being an accessory after the fact. See here," and Mason tapped his breast pocket suggestively.

"You've taken out a warrant then?" asked Winston.

"You bet your young life I have."

"Do you know where to find Elton?"

"We're going to. He was at the Russell, but cleared out last night. Got the wind up, I suppose. It won't take long to pick him up though—the girl will give him away in time."

"She can't if she doesn't know herself where he is."

"Tell that to a Dutchman," returned Mason rudely.

"I'm telling you that Miss Ashleigh does not know where Elton is."

For a moment the two men gazed steadily at each other. Then Winston spoke in a tone of quiet significance.

"Mason," he said, "I want you to leave Miss Ashleigh out of this for the present."



The inspector's eyes narrowed and hardened. "Well, I'm blowed!" he exploded. He leaned forward and brought his clenched fist down into the open palm of his other hand with a loud thwack. "My answer to that is—nothing doing. She knows all about it, and is trying to shield him. Elton was with her that evening. He was with her in the Corner House next morning, and when she was questioned about her companion she gave a wrong name. Does that look like innocence?"

Winston Barrows got up and walked the length of the room and back. Then he came and stood near the inspector.

"Look here, Mason," he said with decision. "I've never let you down, and I won't this time. You would be desperately sorry yourself if you dragged Miss Ashleigh in and then found that you had made a dreadful mistake. She is only a girl, and to go through such an ordeal would be no joke. It would do her a lot of harm—all the apologies and regrets in the world would not compensate her for the hurt she would get. If I thought she was in it I'd say to get on with it; but though we all make mistakes at times, I am convinced that she is as innocent of this crime as you are. And if Elton is the man who did it would he be likely to stay on the scene of the crime from four o'clock until Miss Ashleigh returned at six? The risk of discovery would be so great that no one but an arrant fool would take it. Whoever is guilty cleared out as soon

as possible. Again, if Miss Ashleigh knew anything about it would she be likely to stay there for three hours near the dead body? Not likely. She would need to be a good deal harder than Miss Ashleigh is ever likely to be. Leave her alone for the present. You will thank me afterwards. And, for my part, I'll undertake to have her at hand if you want her later on."

Mason frowned and scratched his head worriedly. Winston never had let him down, and when he spoke with such assurance——

"Humph!" he said. "You seem pretty sure she's not in it. But you seem to have doubts about Elton also. If that's the case——"

Winston's smile was enigmatical.

"Yes; I have strong doubts," he said.

"You have!" Mason almost shouted.

"Then you're daft, I tell you—daft!"

"Maybe. Mind you I don't say that he is not the man. He might be. Personally I doubt it. So far the evidence points equally to three men—an Englishman, an Irishman, and an American—Elton is the American."

That evening Winston Barrows was seated in his office. He was smoking and thinking. The number of cigarette stubs in the ash-tray indicated that this combined process had been going on for some time. A small clock on the mantelpiece struck a single note. Winston looked up. It was a quarter to ten—



getting late. He must go out in a few minutes to keep his appointment for ten o'clock, and the Pup was not in yet to report. Strange that ! He had been expecting him all the evening. Anyway the Pup knew his job—none better.

Just then a car pulled up in front of the house. Winston picked up his hat and went out into the hall. As he passed down the steps on to the pavement he noticed a man loitering on the opposite side of the street. There were no lights near, and in the dusk it was not easy to distinguish anyone clearly at that distance ; yet Winston received the impression that the man had been watching the house he had just left. If so, why ? As Winston crossed to the car the man strolled away down the street.

“ Did you see that man over there, Mike ? ” Winston inquired of his driver.

“ Yes ; I noticed 'im, sir. He was 'anging round like. But it was too dark to see 'im properly.”

“ Possibly someone taking a stroll before turning in,” returned Winston lightly, and, for the time being, dismissed the matter from his mind. It was brought back to his remembrance in an unpleasant manner before the night was over.

On arriving at his destination he dismissed his car, not knowing how long he might be detained. Winston had known this Harley Street doctor for a number of years ; since he was a lad in fact. His father and the

doctor had been close friends in the old days before the crash which had revolutionised Winston's whole mode of life ; from being a young man of wealth and position he had become a worker for his daily bread.

They discussed the matter that had brought Winston there that evening ; then the conversation had drifted to the old days so that it was nearing twelve o'clock before Winston finally took his leave. He managed to pick up a taxi almost immediately, but paid it off at the corner of Gower Street, preferring to walk that short distance.

The night was dark, very dark ; but after the rush and heat of the day Winston enjoyed the quiet and stillness of the night. He took off his hat, walking bareheaded until he arrived at his quarters. The small iron gate was open, and as he stepped in off the pavement, he replaced his hat, his right hand seeking the latch-key in his pocket.

Something, a sound perhaps, maybe an instinct of danger, caused him to duck and turn his head quickly. Crash came a sickening blow ! Winston staggered ; then fell to the ground. . . .

Winston picked himself up, and sought to pull himself together. Came the sound of footsteps . . . running . . . growing fainter . . . fainter. . . . Then he could not have been knocked out for more than a second or two. That was satisfactory at least. He felt badly shaken—as if a battering-ram had used



him for an objective ; but he was thankful to be alive. He ought to have been dead, of course ; as he would have been had his assailant got in his blow properly. That he had not was due to Winston's sudden movement ; to that sixth sense which is extraordinarily developed in those who constantly face danger. The blow had been diverted ; it had fallen on his shoulder instead of his head as intended ; in any case he had not received its full force. He tried to raise his arm. It hurt horribly ; but he could use it ; no bones were broken. As he went upstairs he wondered if his assailant was the man he had seen loitering that night. It seemed likely. But who was he ? Who wanted him out of the way so badly that he was willing to go to the length of murder to accomplish this ?

On reaching his room he poured himself out a stiff brandy and soda and felt better for it. On the table he found a cryptic wire from the Pup which—when elucidated—informed Winston that Elton was now at Godalming, where his actions were not only keeping the Pup busy, but vastly intriguing his interest.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### AN UNSIGNED NOTE AND A MOTOR RIDE

CLARE walked leisurely down Chenies Street until she came to Tottenham Court Road. Here she crossed over to the further side. She had a small purchase to make before she went to one of Lyons' restaurants to get some lunch. Afterwards she would go to Gower Street and look at the rooms Winston Barrows had recommended.

There happened to be a sale on at the shop where she intended making her purchase, and, preoccupied with thoughts of her father's letter, she soon found herself involved in a crowd of bargain-hunters. Tottenham Court Road is busy at any time of the day ; during the dinner hour it is even busier. Add a sale and bargain-hunters, and foot traffic in that area becomes very congested indeed.

Clare was hustled, and bumped, and jostled by fat women and by lean women. Everyone wanted to see what the windows had to offer before going inside to stretch the spending capacity of one pound into two. All and sundry seemed possessed by a desire to go



in a different direction one from the other. With the idea of withdrawing from this strenuous, but good-natured, crowd of people, Clare sought to make her way to the edge of the pavement. She was pulled up summarily by a young mother with a lean purse and eager eyes turned hungrily towards the shop windows, who steered the front wheel of a perambulator containing a pair of healthy twins sharply against Clare's foot. A man would have said "Damn," and felt better. Clare simply stood biting her lip and wincing with the pain—which was considerable; unable for the moment to proceed.

At this precise moment someone slipped a note into her hand. Taken by surprise she nearly let it drop; then turned quickly to see who could have given it to her. In turning she collided with a basket carried by a spacious woman who laughed, said "Sorry," and—blocked her view.

It was annoying, but of course it must have been Warren Elton. She knew no one else. He wanted to communicate with her and had been on the look-out for an opportunity to slip her a note unseen. Clare quite forgot that Elton could have communicated with her through Winston Barrows. She got out of the crowd somehow, went to another shop, where she made her purchase, and while waiting for her change, opened the small piece of folded paper and read it. It ran as follows :

“ If I am to help you I must see you at once. Most urgent. D. H. Evans and Co. are having a sale. Go there and mix with the crowd. At 2.30 p.m. slip out side entrance near lift. Jump into brown Daimler car which will be waiting.”

There was no signature ; but not for an instant did Clare question the identity of the writer. In all this great and wonderful city she had no friend but Warren Elton and, yes, Miss Johnstone had proved herself a friend, and she would always count Winston Barrows such ; but neither of them would have reason to give her a note surreptitiously. No, it was Warren. Something to do with the case had cropped up ; something about which he had to speak to her.

Without a shade of misgiving, Clare changed her plans immediately. She would lunch at Evans's to-day. Walking along slowly—as if time were no object—until she came to a corner where a bus going down Oxford Street would stop, she waited, then jumped on just as the bus was moving. No one got on after her at that halting place, so she hoped that she had succeeded in shaking off Mason's man who was certain to be following her as usual.

Clare partook of a hurried lunch, then went to the ready-made dress department. Here she chose a green silk washing frock which suited her slight figure well. Telling the girl



that she would wear it now that she had it on, she left the dress she had been wearing to be sent to her at Linden House. She next chose a green felt hat, giving instructions for her grey one to be sent home with her grey dress. Now she felt more satisfied. Even if Mason's man had not been shaken off earlier he would not be looking out for a green dress and hat. Surely she ought to get away unobserved—but, oh, how she hated the necessity for this kind of thing ! It was degrading. The fact was she was terrified on Warren's account. It was sheer madness on his part to risk meeting her in this way ; yet if she refused to comply with his request he would probably do something equally, if not more, unwise—that is, if the matter were truly urgent.

It was now five minutes off the half hour. The shop was thronged with people. Hoping for the best, Clare mixed unobtrusively with the crowd gradually making towards the side entrance. At precisely two-thirty she passed through the doorway with several other people. At the same moment a brown Daimler drew up to the kerb. A chauffeur in neat livery stretched out his arm and opened the door for her. She was no sooner in than the car moved rapidly away. Fearful of being seen and followed Clare sat well back, with bent head. Her hat pulled well down afforded an excellent screen. The chauffeur—evidently an experienced driver—kept to the quiet streets at first—then into Seymour Street,

across Edgware Road, gradually working down into the Bayswater Road.

Clare was wondering where she was to meet Warren. She supposed he considered it safer to meet her further afield. Once in the vicinity of Holland Park, Clare thought she might venture to ask questions. But the driver neither turned his head nor made reply.

Clare frowned. She was certain that he had heard her. She began to wonder had she made a mistake and got into the wrong car. But there had been no other Daimler there. She leaned forward and touched the man on the shoulder peremptorily.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked in a tone that brooked no denial. "Where do we meet—— *You!*" She shrank back in utter consternation. For the first time she had seen the chauffeur's face, which he had kept assiduously turned away from her. Now as he looked at her a faint, sardonic smile showed round his mouth.

"I—at your service—as always, Clare," he returned, the smile more in evidence now.

"But—Mr. Le Page—I don't understand——"

He frowned. "Whom did you expect to see, Clare?"

"Not you," she retorted sharply. "You are supposed to be in America."

His face took on a greenish tinge. "I arrived yesterday—flew over from Paris."



"Well, will you please explain now your motive for bringing me here in this way? I have no intention of going any further; so you might as well turn round and go back."

He vouchsafed no reply but drove on steadily; if anything he accelerated—the Daimler was simply eating up the miles.

"Hawtry!" exclaimed Clare, indignant at this buccaneer behaviour. "Was it necessary to resort to such mad measures? If you wanted to see me—to help me, you said, why did you not call in a straightforward manner?"

They shot swiftly past another car, turned a corner, then slowed down a little before he replied.

"That is just what I could not do, Clare," he told her. "Why do you suppose I am in this rig?—not as a joke, I assure you. Don't you read the papers? You must know that you are suspected of this murder, and that the police are on the look-out for a tall, dark man who was with you on Monday evening—the man you expected to meet this afternoon?" and he shot a quick, suspicious glance at her.

She met his glance coldly. "What do you want to see me about?" she demanded. "And why come so far? See, there are no police about—you are quite safe," she added with sarcasm. They were now skirting Putney

Heath, making for the Kingston Road. "Stop the car and let us talk here. I must get back to London quickly. I have to look for new quarters this afternoon."

"Your little back room in Bloomsbury did not prove successful after all?" he suggested, with a significant laugh.

Clare shivered. No, it had not proved successful. She had sought adventure; but murder had never entered into her calculations.

Hawtry Le Page made haste to apologise. "I was a brute to say that," he exclaimed with contrition. "I did not mean it. But, Clare, you know me well enough to realise that I want to help you. I can help you. But I am not going to take unnecessary risks of being pounced upon by an over-zealous police officer. You know you are safe with me—we were good pals in the old days. I'm taking you where we can speak without having to be on the *qui vive* all the time. I'll bring you back to London by seven o'clock."

"All—right," she replied, a little dubiously, however. It would be a bit late, but not too late to go to Gower Street. She had no reason to doubt Hawtry's good faith. As he said, they had been good pals in Trinidad. He had been one of the crowd of friends who had come to the boat to see her off; his was the last hand that had clasped hers before the gangway was removed.



“ I am going to speed up now, Clare. I wish that I could have you in front so that we could talk ; but it's wiser not. You sit back and enjoy the drive. It's quite a decent run out here.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### MASON IS RUFFLED

**I**T was Thursday morning, the day of the inquest. Winston Barrows had arranged to call for Clare and take her to the Coroner's Court. At eight o'clock—looking a bit white after his unpleasant experience of the night before—Winston sat down to partake of eggs and bacon and coffee when there came a thundering knock at the front door, followed immediately by a second knock equally as loud. A minute later Inspector Mason was shown in.

"Hullo, Mason!" cried Winston cheerily. "Come and sit down. You're just in time to join me at breakfast. What's wrong with the universe now?" he questioned, when the maid had departed for an addition to the breakfast.

"Wrong!" ejaculated Mason. "That girl, of course. She's given us the slip—confound her!—the day of the inquest too."

"What girl? You are not referring to Miss Ashleigh by any chance, are you?"

"Aren't I though," retorted Mason bitterly. "Where is she? Don't tell me that you don't



know—you promised to produce her when wanted.”

“Is she not at Linden House?”

“Linden House?” echoed the inspector, waxing wrathful. “Am I not telling you that she’s cleared off? She gave our man the slip yesterday afternoon and has not been seen since. I told you that she was a deep one. She went to Evans’s, changed into a new green dress and hat—a nice innocent artifice to trick our man—then went off in a car that was waiting for her. That’s as far as we’ve traced her up to now.”

Winston sat back in his chair. He was feeling more troubled than he cared to show.

“Do you mean to say,” he asked, “that she did not return last night to Linden House?”

“I mean just that. She’s cleared out, vanished—with her accomplice I suppose.”

The maid came in with some more eggs and bacon.

“Here, get busy on your breakfast while I use the ’phone,” invited Winston.

“Oh, drat breakfast!” exclaimed Mason, who was in a thoroughly bad temper. But he drew up a chair to the table and fell to, nevertheless.

Winston went to the telephone and rang up the address in Gower Street he had given Clare the day before, only to learn that she had not called there. He was puzzled, very puzzled, and just a little anxious. He had

been ready to stake much on Clare's sincerity and forthrightness, and she had told him that she would call and see the rooms yesterday afternoon. That she had not done so but had slipped away like this rather upset his conception of her. But of course Warren Elton must be at the bottom of it—the silly young ass ! Had he not sense enough to know that this was not going to make things easier for the girl. And yet Winston had to admit to himself that Clare Ashleigh would not be easily persuaded to do anything she did not think fit to do—she had far too much strength of character to be easily led. Of course if she was in love with the young American—well, who could say with any assurance what a girl in love might do !

“ Now what are you going to do about it, my lad ? ” demanded Mason, whose mastications had been keeping pace with his excogitations, and who had now reached the marmalade stage.

“ She may turn up at the inquest. ”

Mason glared at the younger man, whose face was as expressionless as a mask. “ And—she—may—not, ” he said unpleasantly. “ What then ? ”

“ In that case we shall look for her. ”

“ Oh, we shall, shall we ? ” Mason rose, pushed back his chair with exasperation. “ She's done herself no good, let me tell you—— ”

“ Nor harm, I trust, ” put in Winston



quietly. "Don't forget that I can prove that she had nothing to do with the murder."

"Humph! She was served with a subpoena to appear this morning—what about that? It's my idea she's gone off with that young American feller who murdered her uncle. But they won't get out of England if that's their game. His father's millions won't help him in this country. They'll both find that they can't trifle with the law here. Well, I'll be getting along"; and the inspector took himself off, leaving Winston Barrows far more concerned at Clare Ashleigh's disappearance than Mason had any idea of. Had Warren Elton a hand in it? According to the Pup's wire of the night before, Elton was down at Godalming. That circumstance was suspicious in itself. His actions were even more so presumably: but had they any reference to Clare Ashleigh and her going away? It would be as well, Winston thought, to take a run down to Godalming and find out what Elton was after. On his way to the Court, Winston sent off a wire to the Pup.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE INQUEST

**T**HE Torrington Square Mystery—as the papers called it—had excited much interest and the Coroner's Court was crowded. While the Court was assembling, and before the proceedings began, Winston's Harley Street friend arrived. Winston, who had been on the look-out for him, greeted him at once.

“Thank you, Sir Henry, for coming,” he said as they shook hands. “I really ought to apologise for bringing such a busy man as yourself from your consulting-rooms; but I wanted your assistance badly.”

The elder man smiled. It was a smile of rare sweetness, arresting, seeming to light up the strong, clever face and unusually brilliant eyes in a remarkable way.

“That is surely sufficient excuse if one were needed,” he replied in his calm, quiet way. “Besides in the interests of justice it is one's duty.”

“True.” Winston laughed. “I'm afraid there are not many men in your position would see it in quite that way. However, I



need not detain you long. The man I spoke of last night is already here. See, that tall, dark man over there in the speckled suit. Have you ever seen him before?"

The doctor cast a scrutinising gaze upon the man indicated and for a moment or two made no comment.

"I cannot say definitely that I have not," he said at length. "There is something familiar about him, and yet—ah! I remember now. He is something like a man I knew years ago, a young surgeon of the name of Riley; but that man had flaming red hair."

"Do you know what became of him?"

"I have not heard anything of him for a long time. He got into trouble. I cannot recall at the moment just what it was—something unsavoury, I believe; but I think he was struck off the Register by the B.M.A."

"How long ago would that be, Sir Henry?"

"During the early days of the war—at the beginning of 1915, it must have been, for it was just after I went to France."

"And how old would he be?"

"About my age—no; some years younger. I was senior at Bart's when he was a junior. I saw very little of him. He was inclined to be a bit wild. I remember one thing about him, though, he was generally known as the Crab."

Sir Henry smiled gently at some recollection. "Strange," he said, "how these things come back to us. I had forgotten the very existence of Riley, and now I remember quite distinctly

his nickname and its origin ; he had a birth-mark on his forearm in the form of a crab. But I'm afraid this is not much help to you, Barrows ? ”

“ I really had very little to go on,” Winston replied. “ There was just a bare chance that something might come of it.”

On his way to the Court, Winston Barrows had called at Linden House according to his promise to Clare, and hoping against hope that he would find her there waiting for him. Of course she was not there. Her failure to appear at the inquest gave rise to much adverse speculation. “ Contempt of Court ” was no light matter. The many reporters who crowded the court made the most of it when writing up their stories.

James Scott, the proprietor of Linden House, gave his evidence in a clear and concise manner. He had been talking to Mr. Hammond—one of the boarders—in the dining-room, when they heard a dreadful scream upstairs. They both rushed out and up the stairs—in fact everyone in the house heard the scream and rushed to see what was wrong. They met Miss Ashleigh running down the stairs towards them. She told them there was a man in her room ; she thought he was dead. Yes, she was very white, and agitated. He and Mr. Hammond had straightway gone up to her flat where they found the body of a man on the floor behind a screen in the bedroom. They had not touched anything. He



had locked the doors of the two rooms and had immediately rung up the police. A number of questions were put to Scott, all of which he answered succinctly and to the point.

The divisional surgeon stated that he had examined the body and found that the man had been dead for about five hours—rigor mortis had set in. He would put the time of death at about four o'clock in the afternoon. He then gave an account of the wound. The blow had been struck with force. The dagger—a Malay kris—had entered just above the left shoulder-blade, damaging the aorta and piercing the lung. Bleeding was almost entirely internal. Death must have occurred within a few minutes of the blow being struck. There was some excitement when, in answer to a question put by the coroner, he stated that while not necessarily so, it was his opinion that the blow was struck by someone with surgical knowledge, as by placing the blow just where he did, the murderer had greatly minimised the risk of bloodstains.

Annie Long testified to sending up a gentleman visitor to Miss Ashleigh's room at five minutes to four on Monday afternoon. She was quite sure of the time because she was just going out and was in a hurry. When she saw the visitor at the door she looked at the hall clock to see what time she had, and it wanted five minutes to the hour.

The gentleman asked for Miss Ashleigh. She hadn't any time to waste with him, so she told

him that Miss Ashleigh was upstairs in the attic sitting-room and would he please go up. How did she know that Miss Ashleigh was in her sitting-room? Because she had had to go up to the bedroom a few minutes before with some clean towels that she had forgotten, and she had heard someone putting up the window in the sitting-room. No, she had not seen Miss Ashleigh, but had supposed it must have been she since she did not know at the time how it could be anyone else. Afterwards she thought Miss Ashleigh must have had another visitor with her. When questioned on this point Annie explained that as she was leaving the house she had missed her handbag. She remembered that it was hanging over her arm when she had taken up the clean towels. She had to go all the way upstairs again to get it. The sitting-room door was closed, but she heard someone say: "*You! Oh my God!*" No, she had not waited to hear any more. It wasn't her business, and she had been delayed enough as it was. She just wanted to get away before the boss came along and found something else for her to do. It was a man's voice she had heard; she did not recognise it. It sounded hoarse and strained. How long after she had sent the gentleman upstairs? No more than a few minutes. She had never seen him before that Monday afternoon; but she had seen him the next day, when he was dead—the inspector made her go and look at him although she told him that she had a weak stomach and



would scream if she had to look at a dead man, and him murdered too. (Here Annie flung a few glancing daggers at Detective Inspector Mason, who received them with equanimity.) Annie was quite ready to swear that the murdered gentleman, and the gentleman she had sent upstairs, were one and the same.

Interest was well on towards flood-tide when Lizzie Barker, second maid at Linden House, told the court that she had sent a caller up to Miss Ashleigh's room at twenty minutes to four on Monday afternoon. No, she had not gone up with him as the rooms were at the top of the house. She only had two legs anyhow, and she was a working girl. No, she never did go up with visitors—not if they looked all right. The coroner wanted to know what she meant by "all right." Whereupon Lizzie explained that she meant "real ladies and gents," for there were some people that thought they were ladies and gents, but they weren't—"not real ones anyhow." There was far too much running up and down stairs as it was, and only two pair of feet and a charlady to do it all—the charlady only came for the mornings. She had no idea whether Miss Ashleigh were in her room or not, and she did not know how long the visitor stayed; she did not see him again. Yes, this man was a real gent. He was tall and handsome—like a cinema gent—with dark hair and eyes, and an American accent. Yes, she would say that he was a very

strong man ; but he did not look like a murderer.

Ellen Stone—housemaid at Claremont Park, Surrey—well sustained the interest of the court with an account of the tall, dark man—who spoke like an American—whom she had heard quarrelling with Mr. Claremont in the library on Sunday night, more especially when she repeated the words she had heard. “ If you still insist, I’ll go to Bloomsbury and tell her myself. She will never forgive you.”

Mason’s evidence was damning to Warren Elton all through, as Winston Barrows knew it would be. James Claremont had invited Warren Elton to lunch on the Tuesday. Elton had neither sent an apology, nor had he kept the engagement. This was strange behaviour in view of the fact that, at that time, no one knew the identity of the murdered man. This Warren Elton answered to the description of Claremont’s visitor on Sunday night, and to Miss Ashleigh’s visitor sent upstairs at twenty minutes to four by Lizzie Barker. Both men were described as being tall and dark. Both spoke like an American. Warren Elton was tall and dark, and he was an American. The words heard by Ellen Stone undoubtedly referred to Clare Ashleigh. The man who spoke those words—with an American accent—said that he would go to Bloomsbury and tell her himself, meaning that he would go and see Miss Ashleigh. The words were spoken as a threat. That Warren Elton had been to see



Miss Ashleigh was proved beyond dispute by the fact that a broken cuff-link bearing the initials W.P.E. was found in Miss Ashleigh's sitting-room on Monday night. This Elton had been entered at the Russell Hotel as Dr. Warren P. Elton of New York, U.S.A.; but on Tuesday night he had left the hotel suddenly, leaving no address behind him. Mason touched but lightly on the reason for Elton's visit to England—that could come later.

The result of the inquest was "Wilful murder against Warren P. Elton."

Mason came up to Winston Barrows afterwards.

"Well," he said harshly. "What did I tell you? That girl didn't turn up—didn't suppose she would. She'll get it now for contempt of court anyway."

Winston stroked his chin with composure. "Let us follow Asquith's advice, Mason," he observed tranquilly. "I think it will serve us well in this case."

"Phut! Serve your grandmother," returned Mason rudely as he strode away.

Winston Barrows laughed quietly to himself as he threw a quick, searching glance to right and left, then gave an almost imperceptible nod to a young man whose gaze had intercepted his, and who now followed him outside.

"Look here, Watt," said Winston. "I want you to look up the case of a Dr. Riley—early in 1915 the case was on. Get on to it at

once. I want everything you can find out about him. I shall be away this afternoon and evening, but will probably give you a ring about eight or nine o'clock."

"Right oh!"

Winston's next move was to the nearest café. He gave his order, and while it was being attended to he went into the telephone box.

"Is that you, Mike?" he asked, when he was given the number. "I want the old bus just as soon as you can bring it round here." He gave the address of the café. "Got it? No, I won't want you on this trip—I shall be driving myself."

A short time later, Winston Barrows was on his way to Godalming.



## CHAPTER XXI

### WHAT HAPPENED AT THE LODGE

CLARE sat back in her seat and was soon lost in thought. And surely she had much to occupy her thoughts. This was only Wednesday ; but since Monday evening so many experiences had crowded upon her that she seemed to have lived years in the interval. At another time, when not surrounded by an atmosphere of tragedy, she would have enjoyed motoring through Surrey. The peaceful English landscape would have afforded extreme pleasure to one accustomed to the luxurious and exotic scenery of the Tropics. As it was she was scarcely conscious of the country through which they passed. Le Page made no further attempt at conversation, which was anything but satisfactory, seated as they were and at the pace they were travelling. They had some distance to go and it was his object to cover that distance while Clare was in a quiescent mood. She was so still and quiet that he wondered if she had fallen asleep. He hoped she had. It was even so. The smooth running of the car, and the sweet, fresh air fragrant with the

scent of summer had lulled her into the rest she badly needed.

Clare was roused by the sweeping of branches against the car and the crushing of bracken. She sat up and looked about her. They had entered some woods where the car was crashing its way through the undergrowth. A few minutes later the car stopped. Hawtry Le Page jumped out and opened the door. Clare stood on the step gazing about her in surprise.

"Here!" she exclaimed.

Hawtry laughed as he held out his hand to help her.

"Come. You will understand soon." And he led the way through the thick brushwood, freeing her dress from brambles. "Here we are, Clare. This is better, isn't it?"

They had come out into a glade where stood a small hunting-lodge. It was half hidden by creepers, and Clare thought it one of the prettiest places she had ever seen. But it had a deserted appearance—deserted, and very lonely, hidden away in the heart of these woods. She was not at all sure that she wanted to go there. Then the door opened and Clare saw an elderly manservant who evidently expected them.

Le Page led her into a sitting-room which had the appearance of not having been used for some time. It was comfortably furnished, but as Clare was quick to observe, it was essentially a man's room.



"I shall bring tea immediately, Master Hawtry?" said the servant.

Le Page nodded and the man withdrew.

"You must be needing a cup of tea, Clare, after that long drive?" he said as he drew up a comfortable chair, close to a table that was ready laid for tea.

"I shall be glad of it," she replied: "and thankful to take off my hat for a little while—it's so hot pulled down like this," and she took off the new felt hat and placed it on a chair close by.

"Now, Clare, if you will please excuse me for one moment," and Le Page went out, pulling the door close after him. It failed to catch properly, however, and swung ajar.

Then through the open space came the sound of Le Page and the old servant talking. At first Clare paid no attention. It was not her business; she was not interested. But there was a timbre in the old man's voice that was arresting. It betrayed great anxiety. Then came Hawtry's tones, a little raised, irritable.

"Oh, it's all right, Johnstone—no need to get the wind up. The police know nothing of this place. Besides, we've always got the Warren."

"But the young lady——"

Clare felt a sudden shiver down her back. She was interested now all right. "The young lady——"

Came Hawtry's impatient tones: "It's the only way, I tell you."

Clare could not hear what followed immedi-

ately. Then in pleading accents the old servant spoke again.

"Oh, Master Hawtry, don't do it! Don't do it! I wouldn't, sir, if I was you."

"Well, you're not; so that finishes it," snapped the younger man, and the girl, listening, thought she would like to teach him a lesson in manners. He continued: "Is that door locked? Yes? Well just do as I tell you and keep a sharp look-out. Understand? Now hurry up with the tea."

A vague fear had taken hold of Clare. Surely she had done wrong to come here. "The Warren"? What did Hawtry mean? And what was it the old servant did not want him to do? And the "Young lady"? Did he refer to her? Perhaps the old man thinks Hawtry should not have run the risk of bringing me here, she thought, eager to persuade herself that it was so.

When Le Page re-entered the room he must have noticed that the door was ajar and wondered how much Clare had heard, for he threw a quick look of suspicion in her direction. Then he laughed his sardonic laugh. Clare never had liked his laugh, now——

"Old Johnstone thinks I'm running risks in bringing you down here, Clare," he said—almost as though he was aware of her thoughts. "The old boy is quite upset."

"So that is the explanation," thought Clare. "How very absurd of me to think anything else." And yet, in spite of her relief,



fear remained with her like a creature crouching in the dark ready to spring forth at any moment.

"But it's all right," continued Le Page, comfortably. "No one followed us—I'm dead certain of that. Ah, here's the tea! That will do, Johnstone. Will you pour out, or shall I, Clare? Perhaps I had better. You have a rest. Milk and sugar?"

He gave her tea, helped her to thin brown bread and butter, and placed a plate of cakes near to hand.

"Now, Hawtry," said Clare, "I'm waiting to hear what all this mystery is about."

He hesitated for a moment; then putting down his cup he seated himself on the couch near her chair.

"Clare," he said earnestly; "I'm frightened for you—what they will do to you."

"But why? I did not kill my uncle."

"Your *uncle*!" he echoed. "Oh, of course; it was in the morning papers. But, Clare; you say you did not do it and of course I know that is true because—well, because I love you, dear, and know you to be incapable of such a dreadful thing. But it is a different matter with the police. There is no sentiment with them. I fear the result of the inquest to-morrow morning—that they will charge you with the murder. I could not bear that, Clare. I want to save you from it."

"But how?" She was looking at him strangely—she was frankly puzzled.

"I believe it is merely a matter of time before you are cleared. If you could disappear until then——"

"Disappear!" She eyed him keenly. "Oh, no! They would believe then that I was indeed guilty."

"They will believe that anyway to-morrow. I want to save you from arrest; to keep you out of the way until——"

"To hide me here!" She was aghast.

"No; of course not. I will take you over to the Continent by 'plane to-night—I have mine all ready."

Clare's eyes opened wide with amazement. She had not expected anything quite so mad as this.

"Thank you," she said quietly. "I prefer to take my chance. It is kind of you, Hawtry, to want to help me; but what you propose would only fix the guilt on me and involve you in this dreadful affair also."

"I am involved anyway——" He broke off, biting his lip. "That is, if I have been seen with you. Besides, anything that affects you affects me also. How could I bear it, Clare, if you are arrested for murder? You know that I love you and would do anything in the world to serve you. Come away with me. Once we are out of England we can be married——"

"But I don't want to marry you. I told you that before."

"But you must, Clare," he exclaimed with



emphasis. "Circumstances have changed since then. It is the only way by which I can save you." Then seeing from her quiet face that he had failed to convince her—to move her, he burst out in agitation: "Do you know what it would be like to stand in the dock," he said, "you, Clare, with your innocence and your pride—a *prisoner*!—with a sea of faces gaping at you, gloating over your shame and misery; while men hammer you with questions, twisting your words this way and that—giving them a meaning you never intended; and a crowd of hungry reporters write up sensational accounts of the proceedings—how you looked; how you were dressed—and take snapshots of you to supply sauce for the public's breakfast? This for *you*, Clare. Oh, my God, think of it! Your name on every lip; your pride in the dust. Why, I'd rather be back in the thick of the war again than face *that*! Clare," he besought her with much earnestness; "marry me, dear, and be clear of all this—prison, and trial, and—God, who knows! perhaps conviction. Justice miscarries sometimes. Clare, don't you see?"

Her face was white, very white, like drifting snow, and her eyes held the pain of a trapped creature's.

"No," she made answer in a low tone: "I don't see. I am dense perhaps; but I do not see why I should be forced to marry a man I do not care for—in that way, I mean—or else suffer for a crime of which I am innocent.

The laws of England are just. Even if I am charged with murder I can surely prove my innocence and be free again ; but were I to marry you I could never be free until one or the other died. I prefer to stand my trial if necessary."

" Clare, you talk as though you hate me or—egad! what a fool I am! I never thought of that ; there's someone else ? Tell me, Clare—is that it ? "

She made no reply, but the faint colour that tinged her pale cheeks was illuminating to Hawtry Le Page.

" So it is that, is it ? " he sneered. He thought for a moment, his hands clenching and unclenching in nervous irritation. " Jove, what a fool I have been ! " he exclaimed. " I see it all now. It's that American who was with you on Monday afternoon ; the man the police are looking for ; the man you expected to meet this afternoon, eh ? "

" I was not at home on Monday afternoon," she said, a little wearily. " The man who killed my uncle was the tall, dark man who called to see me at twenty minutes to four——"

Her cup fell with a crash to the floor as she broke off, springing up from her chair in consternation ; for at her words stark terror had swept into the ghastly face of Le Page as he cowered before her.

" Y—Y—*You!* " she whispered hoarsely—her trembling lips could scarcely frame the words.



His recovery was almost instantaneous.

"You little fool!" he cried in a burst of anger. "You're mad. What have I to do with it?" his tone changed. "Clare," he said, beseechingly, and put his hand on hers.

She flung it off as though it were an unclean thing, and sprang back.

"No, no! Don't touch me! It was you. I see it all now. My father feared your influence with his brother. You wanted Claremont Park, so came to Trinidad to try and marry me—the heir. The detective thought that—I understand now why he asked that question."

The man sprang forward and caught her roughly by the arms. His eyes were blazing as they glared into hers.

"What question? What detective? Answer me." And in his anger and impatience he shook her violently as an animal shakes its prey.

She tried to fling him off; but in his powerful grasp she was as helpless as a bird in the hungry jaws of a cat.

"He wanted to know whether you had asked me to marry you," she said.

"And you said 'yes'?"

She met his gaze unflinchingly. "I told him that I had refused you."

His hands fell limply to his sides as he staggered away from her. "Oh, my God!" he cried. "He'll blame me." And he covered his face with his hands.

For the space of a moment Clare stood looking at this man who would have married her ; this man who had been her friend—a murderer! She shuddered. She felt sick ; deadly sick. Suddenly she stepped across to the chair and took up the new green hat. In a second, Hawtry Le Page was beside her, his hand gripping hard on her wrist.

“ What are you doing ? ” he demanded.

“ I am going home,” she answered quietly.

“ No, you’re not. You are not going back to denounce me—to save your skin at the price of mine, eh ? I tell you that I did not do it——”

“ You are the tall, dark man who called on Monday. You have a slight American accent ——”

“ I tell you it was not I ! ” he almost shrieked the words. “ Don’t you believe me ? ” But he could see that she did not.

She tried to free her wrist. “ Let me go, please. It is getting late——” But he caught her in a fierce grasp.

“ You little fool ! ” he rasped. “ Do you think that I will let you go now ? ”

“ You surely don’t intend to murder me as you murdered my uncle ! A—h ! He—lp ! ” There was a short struggle ; a stifled scream, then—silence.



Omkar S Ashu  
Artist  
2nd Bridge Singar

## CHAPTER XXII

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

THE Torrington Square murder had taken place at the beginning of the hottest week of the year, when unprepared people were suffering from one of the most severe and prolonged heat waves that had ever stricken the country. There had been one or two hints of a break ; a smudge of cloud had appeared, a few heat spots had fallen, but that was all. On this Thursday afternoon, however, as Winston Barrows motored along the Portsmouth Road, he saw signs that the longed-for break was not far off. The sky was overcast, the atmosphere sultry with the airlessness that presages a storm. Much as rain was needed, Winston hoped that it would hold off until night, for he expected to have his time fully occupied once he arrived at Godalming. As it was he would not get down there until the afternoon was well advanced. Still his " old bus "—or " Jane " as he called his car—could give a pretty good account of herself when necessary, and Winston simply let her go, enjoying to the full the wind she made as she fairly licked up

mile after mile of the road. Once, as he was nearing his destination, he stopped for a cup of tea; then on again.

He was anxious to see Warren Elton. That Elton should leave the Russell Hotel was understandable. That he had failed to communicate with him was not. Although Elton was not aware of the damning amount of evidence against him, he knew he was under suspicion, and, unless he courted arrest, it behoved him to keep out of the way of the police. But, seeing that he had commissioned Winston to act on his behalf, why not keep in touch with him? Of course his coming to Winston might have been but a blind, a clever ruse to throw dust in the eyes both of the police and Clare Ashleigh: Winston was quite willing to admit Elton's shrewdness. But what was his object in coming to Godalming of all places? Was it a flash of genius that brought him to the last place the police would dream of looking for him? Winston thought not. Judging from the Pup's communication, Elton seemed to have a definite purpose other than hiding from the police, and Winston wanted to know what that purpose was.

Another thing—Clare Ashleigh had to be found without delay. Winston made a mistake here. He attributed her disappearance to Warren Elton. That Hawtry Le Page was connected with it never occurred to him. From his inquiries he had learnt that Le Page had arrived in England, in fact he had travelled



by the same boat as Warren Elton—a strange coincidence, if it was a coincidence. But Winston was under the impression that Le Page had had no communication with Clare. Knowing that Clare—though free in her movements since Tuesday morning—had been subjected to a strict espionage—her correspondence also—he would have considered any communication between them wellnigh impossible.

Le Page was another reason for Winston's visit to Godalming. He had to be found also. Winston was convinced that he was in the neighbourhood of Claremont Park, and the butler knew where.

On the outskirts of Godalming, Winston began to look about for the Pup, and was soon rewarded with a sight of the boy's lean figure approaching. The Pup's mouth widened into a broad grin of welcome. Winston drew up, and the Pup got in.

"You can drive on, sir," he said. "I'll direct yer, and I'll tell yer everything as we go along."

"Right oh, Pup. But where are you directing me to?"

"I thought you'd like to see what 'is nibs is up to. He's spying round in the Claremont Park woods this afternoon."

"Yes; I would like to see what he is up to. But I don't want 'Jane' to be seen——"

"I'll direct yer right, sir. I know just where to park 'er. It's a long way; miles and miles.

He's got a bike—bought it too. I hired one so as to foller 'im. I've just left it at my place where I stop."

"That was a brainy idea. Did you get something to eat before coming on to meet me—it may be late before——"

The Pup's head wagged in the affirmative. "You bet I did, Guv'nor. I had a ginger pop, and a meat pie, and a tart——"

"And a pain in your tummy, I shouldn't wonder?"

"Not on yer life—them things don't hurt me."

"All right. Now, the first thing I want to know is whether you have seen that young lady who called on me on Tuesday afternoon?"

"When his nibs was there?"

"When Mr. Elton was there, yes. You remember her, don't you?"

The Pup wagged his head sideways.

"Garn, Gov'nor! What d'yer take me for? Course I remember 'er. She's tall and fair like one of them lilies in the shop winders, and 'olds 'erself—so."

And the Pup proceeded to demonstrate Clare's carriage by drawing up his body until it was as straight as a ramrod, and holding up his head until his snub nose pointed to the sky above.

"All right, Pup. All right," exclaimed Winston, laughing. "I don't want you to break in two over it. The point is, have you seen her down here?"



“ No, sir. Is she down here too ? ”

“ I don't know, Pup. I want to find that out. Where was Mr. Elton yesterday afternoon ? Did he go out in a car ? ”

“ No—he used 'is bike. Yesterday afternoon he was prowlin' round the Park like he's doing to-day. I was a-shadowin' 'im all the time.”

“ What time did he go out ? ”

“ He was out all the morning ; then in the afternoon he went out again about two o'clock.”

“ I—see.”

Then it was not Warren Elton who drove Clare out of London. Mason said that she got into a car about two or a little after. Then who was it ? Anyway, it must wait now.

“ Tell me what you have found out here, Pup.”

“ Well, first, his nibs 'as given up being an American gent. Now he's a—what do yer call the place ? a Can something.”

“ A Canadian ? ”

“ That's it. He's a Canadian now, and his name is Charles Flemming—Yer turn up 'ere, sir. That's it ; then to the right.” The Pup resumed his story. “ His nibs 'as got rooms in a cottage on the other side of the village. There's a girl at that place—she's got a baby, she has. And who d'yer think she is ? ”

“ Tell me, Pup,” said Winston smiling encouragingly. Knowing the Pup well, Winston knew it was wiser to let the Pup tell his

story in his own way. It proved shorter in the long run.

"Well, 'er name's Agnes Dutton—Dutton's the name of the people who have the cottage, and she's the daughter, see?"

"I see. Go on."

"She used to be maid at Claremont Park——"

"Ah—h!"

"But she was turned off when the baby came along. There was an 'orrible row about it. Mr. Claremont—he's the gent what's just been and got murdered up in London—cleared 'er out, and he cleared the young master up there out too, and told 'im never to come back there no more because he was a disgrace to the family. 'Cos why? Because the baby's 'is."

"Oh," observed Winston thoughtfully. "Wait, Pup, for a minute or two while I straighten one or two things in my mind."

There was food for thought here. Mason was certain that Elton was Claremont's Sunday night visitor. Winston was equally certain that it was Hawtry Le Page. One objection had been the supposed absence of Le Page in America. That objection no longer existed. The second objection was the surreptitiousness of the visit. Why should not Le Page come openly to his home? The fact that he had been forbidden the house would furnish a reason for coming in the manner he did. He wanted to see his stepfather; but did not



risk meeting with a rebuff at the front door. He knew his stepfather's habits, that it was his custom to sit in the library after dinner. What more natural than to enter through the low window? If his stepfather resented his coming, well, there was no one to witness the coldness of his reception. It was quite conceivable that Le Page would speak of Clare to her uncle; but not so in the case of Warren Elton, who up to that time was, presumably, a stranger to both. But Le Page not only knew Clare, but had gone to the length of taking a trip to Trinidad in order to win her for his wife while she was in ignorance both of her birthright, and of the relationship in which Le Page stood to her uncle. Why? Surely because he knew that the estates were entailed, that his only chance of participation in the Claremont inheritance was as Clare's husband. This plan had failed. Clare had refused to marry him. The words spoken in the library were now clear. Le Page had somehow learnt the part that James Claremont had acted towards his twin brother, that he held the Claremont estates just so long as he preserved the guilty silence he had held all these years. Claremont's visit to Clare proved conclusively that he was about to break that silence, or at least to make her aware of her birthright. Le Page's plans having gone awry, he wanted Claremont to let things remain as they were, that is, not to tell Clare, in which case, as an adopted son, he could hold the estates in trust as his step-

father had done. This would explain the quarrel. Claremont's belated determination to make amends to Clare ; to speak. Le Page loses his temper and threatens—"If you still insist (on telling her) I'll go to Bloomsbury and tell her myself. She'll never forgive you." He will tell the story in his way and thus frustrate any hope of friendship with Clare that her uncle was building on. That all seemed clear enough.

Le Page had kept his word too, in that he had gone to Linden House at twenty minutes to four on Monday afternoon—just twenty minutes before Claremont met his death. Lizzie Barker had recognised his photograph. He had probably gone to try his chance again with Clare. If he failed he would tell her the story. Claremont had come instead of Clare. Le Page had exclaimed—"You!—Oh, my God!" His plans had failed again. He was a man of passionate temper—if his photograph was to be relied upon ; of powerful physique, quite capable of driving home that kris which lay so conveniently near to hand and of carrying the body into the next room, and—he had the surgical knowledge also.

It was strange that Mason had not considered Hawtry Le Page in connection with the murder. His supposed absence in America must have put him off for one thing, that and the tenacity of his belief in Warren Elton's guilt from the start. Mason was like that. Let him get his grip on to anything and the world



could go up in smoke before he let go. And that was a very fine trait provided he got his grip into the right person. And after all his case against Elton was every bit as strong as the case against Hawtry Le Page.

Here the Pup's voice broke in upon his meditations.

"Sorry to interrupt yer thinking, sir," he said in a business tone; "but this is where yer run 'er into the wood."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### WINSTON IS PUZZLED

**W**INSTON BARROWS turned his car into the wood at the place indicated by the Pup.

"Good cover here, Pup," he said approvingly. "One could hide half a dozen cars and no one be any the wiser."

The Pup wriggled with pride. Commendation from Winston was dear to his Cockney heart.

"There's an easy getaway too," he replied. "Yer don't turn 'er; yer just go round these 'ere bushes when yer want to go and there y'are. His nibs keeps 'is bike further down. Now we go along 'ere. Dunno what 'is nibs is after—looking for a yeller gold-mine perhaps; but 'e mostly spies about among some bushes and rocks further on."

The Pup led Winston into the heart of the woods. They proceeded cautiously, careful not to proclaim their presence by undue rustling of branches or the cracking of twigs. Suddenly the Pup put a detaining hand on Winston's arm.

"Sh-h!" he whispered. "He's there, I think—in among them bushes and things."



“ All right. You cut along to the car and wait.”

The Pup nodded in acquiescence and disappeared.

Winston Barrows went forward slowly. There was plenty of cover, for the bushes were thick with their summer leafage. Nevertheless he went warily. And it was well that he did so ; for as he approached a part where the woods began to thin, he pulled up abruptly and drew back swiftly into shelter. He had caught a momentary glimpse of a man's figure before it disappeared behind some rocks. Until now the woods were thick with trees and bushes and much dense undergrowth. Just ahead of where Winston had stopped the vegetation suddenly became sparse, gradually giving place to an outcrop of flat rocks ; but in the centre, rising to an eminence of some thirty-odd feet, were great rocks loosely massed together as though tossed there by some gargantuan hand. Here and there, in the interstices, bushes had sought lodgement and found a lean existence. It was behind one of these immense rocky boulders that the man had disappeared. He had slipped from the shelter of one boulder to another, crossing a piece of flat, rocky ground to do so.

Winston waited, keeping well concealed, and peering through a light screen of foliage. He hoped the man would show himself again. His glimpse had been so fleeting that he could not tell whether it were Elton or not.

But one thing he had observed, the man's clothing harmonised so well with the colour of the rocks that by movement alone was he likely to attract attention at a short distance.

The evening was closing in and an eerie silence brooded over the woods. Even the birds were mute as Nature waited, breathless, for the rain that had been threatening all the afternoon. Winston wished the man would hurry up and show himself again, and began to wonder if he had himself been seen. He was debating in his mind the expediency of going nearer. It was just possible to obtain a modicum of screenage by working round to the right where the woods encroached nearer to the outcrop of rocks.

A bare minute later and he was glad that he had waited. A man's face showed for a brief space round the edge of the rock. He gave a quick, searching glance to either side as though to assure himself of being alone. Winston's lips formed the shape of a whistle—the man was Warren Elton.

"What the dickens is he up to?" Winston was thoroughly puzzled. "What can he want here?" he asked of himself. "He's not just out for a merry little picnic, and it's a dead cert he's not studying the formation of those rocks. People don't busy themselves with these little matters when they're wanted on a charge of murder—it simply isn't done."

At last Elton crept out from behind his shelter on to the flat strata of rock that ran



in a short distance between the big loose rocks. After another searching glance about him he went down on his knees, his hands spread out, palms downward, in front of him on the ground, his body crouched forward in the Eastern attitude of prayer.

Winston's feeling as he gazed, wide-eyed, through his screen of leafage, was one of absolute amazement. "What the—egad! the blighter has turned Mohammedan—he's saying his prayers! He'll need 'em all right: he's ratty—*my God!*"

For suddenly, as an arrow shot from a bow, Warren Elton had fallen, face downward, spread-eagled—motionless.

And Winston stood staring, staring in consternation, stricken motionless by the unexpectedness and suddenness of the disaster. Then, even as the words formed on his lips, "He's been done in!" he jerked himself free of the sense of horror that had overtaken him like a strangling garment, and the next minute he was crashing through the bracken and between the bushes and over the bare rocky ground, his hand gripping his revolver—for who could say whether he who had got Elton might not be still lurking behind those rocks.

It took him but a few minutes to cover the distance. He pulled up short, and there he stood wondering if his eyes deceived him. The place was empty. There was nothing to show that Elton had ever been there.

“ Well, I’ll be hanged ! ” he exclaimed. “ Am I suffering from hallucination or nightmare or what ? ” He looked about him, frowning. “ This is the place all right—that chap was lying there a few minutes ago. Then where the dickens is he now ? He must be about here somewhere—dead or alive. You just wait until I get you, my lad.” And Winston started to make a thorough search of the rocks. He climbed here. He climbed there. He rounded this rock and worked between those boulders, careless now whether he was seen or not. In fact he combed the place so that a cat could not have remained hidden. The perspiration was dripping from him. But his search proved fruitless. He might have merely dreamed that he had seen Elton there, so completely had he disappeared.

Exasperated at his want of success he returned to the flat rock and, sitting down, wiped the moisture from his forehead. Then suddenly he broke into laughter, unrestrained, burbling laughter. He simply could not help it. The ridiculousness of it ! Here was he getting the wind up thinking Elton had been killed—or killed himself—and the blighter was having a joke on him. How he had vanished in that short space of time was a mystery ; it partook of the character of a magician’s trick. “ Anyway ”—and Winston grinned cheerfully at the remembrance of his fright—“ Anyway, he is alive. That much is certain. I defy anyone, even Samson himself,



to carry him away in that time. Heaven only knows what he was doing lying on his face like that—penance, probably ; but he is a swift youth, and only on his own mercurial feet did he manage that vanishing trick. No wreath needed for him yet awhile.”

Winston rose to his feet and cast a scrutinising glance about him. From afar off came a low muttering of thunder. “Now we’ll be getting the rain, I suppose,” he soliloquised. But his mind was far from the weather.

“Now let me see,” he murmured. “He was lying just there.” He took a few steps forward. “His head must have been—Great Scott ! That must be it. He was looking down that crack,” and down went Winston upon his hands and knees—in the attitude Elton had assumed a short time before—to peer into a fissure that ran the length of the flat rock opening out wider, considerably wider, where a huge mass of rock overhung it. There was nothing to be seen down the opening, nothing but darkness.

Winston wondered whatever Elton was looking for. He straightened himself and stood frowning down at the fissure, lost in thought. Warren Elton was no fool ; in fact he was a remarkably sharp young man in Winston’s opinion. He knew that the police had him under suspicion. Was it likely in such circumstances that he would come prowling about here unless he had some

urgent reason? And that reason? A hiding-place? If so, whose? Immediately there flashed into his mind the man he had seen slip into the woods on Tuesday evening, the man he believed to be Hawtry Le Page. Anyone seeing Winston Barrows just then would have thought him fast asleep, so deep was he in concentration. His eyes were closed; his body motionless as his mind pieced together the parts of the puzzle he had set himself to solve. If there was a hiding-place here, so ran his thoughts—and an old house such as Claremont most probably had its secrets—who would be more likely to know of it than Hawtry Le Page? Again—did not he himself hold the opinion that Le Page was hiding somewhere in the neighbourhood? But what had Elton to do with it? He had travelled by the same boat as Le Page so must know something about him. If he read the papers he would know more. Had that astute young man put two and two together until he guessed Le Page's secret?

Given up to thought Winston had paid no heed to the gathering clouds which had spread themselves like an inky blanket across the heavens, until with a startling abruptness the sky was riven by a flash of lightning and the intense silence smitten by a terrific crash of thunder.

Winston sprang to his feet with a rapidity that suggested being jerked up by electricity. He was under the impression that even as the



thunder crashed he had heard a cry. He stood listening intently ; all his senses alert. Nothing ! Then he knelt down with his ear to the fissure in the rock ; but overhead the thunder pealed and crashed, crash following crash, and the lightning flashed incessantly, lighting up the scene with singular brightness. The noise was deafening, the light blinding. Yet still Winston lingered ; for he could almost have sworn that he had heard a cry.

Then fell the rain. At first in great, hissing drops, falling reluctantly upon the heated rocks and the dry, thirsty ground, bringing an acrid tang to the nostrils. Then faster, faster it came, hitting and spitting on the dust-laden leaves. By the time Winston had reached the car the rain had settled into a sodden downpour.

"Here y'are, sir," came in the Pup's sibilant whisper. He had put up the top and the car was snug and dry.

"Did yer see 'is nibs, sir," he asked as they sped through the pouring rain.

"Yes. But he gave me the slip somehow."

The Pup grinned in the darkness.

"He would. He's that sort. But I can show yer where he's stopping."

"Good. But I think we will have a meal first."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### WHERE IS ELTON ?

**T**HE rain had ceased when Winston Barrows set out to pay Elton a surprise visit.

The Duttons lived in an old-fashioned cottage with a thatched roof. In fact the back portion of the place was over three hundred years old, its roofs were low, its oak rafters black with age. The front had been added to ; it was more modern, and, undoubtedly, more comfortable to dwell in. The cottage stood in an old-world garden where sweet and simple flowers rioted in season. The rain had caused the evening to close in early, nevertheless when Winston opened the front gate, he saw a woman in the garden tying up some plants that had been beaten down by the rain. She turned round as Winston approached and peered at him through the deep, sweet-scented dusk. Satisfied that it was a stranger, she stood waiting for him to speak.

“ Mrs. Dutton, I believe ? ” questioned Winston, raising his hat courteously.



She nodded. "Aye," she said. "And what may you be wanting?"

"A friend of mine is staying with you—Mr. Flemming."

"Mr. Flemming's not at home, sir."

"Not at home?" he echoed blankly. "Perhaps you could tell me where I might find him?—I wish to see him particularly."

She shook her head.

"Sorry, sir, but that's just what I can't do. I don't know where he is. He has not come in yet for his supper. I thought you was him just now."

"Oh! Then he may be back at any minute?" Winston was astonished to hear that Elton had not yet returned. He had supposed him to be home long ago, before the rain in fact.

"Maybe, sir. He didn't say. He went out directly after dinner—about a quarter to two, I think it was, sir. He has not been home since."

"I see. Well, thank you, Mrs. Dutton."

"You're welcome, sir. What name shall I tell him, sir?"

Winston had half turned to go; now he faced the woman again.

"Perhaps you had better not mention my having called." Then he added confidentially. "He does not know that I am down here and I would like to give him a surprise, you know," and Winston smiled knowingly at her as though including her in a little secret.

She smiled in response. "I understand, sir. Good night, sir."

Winston walked further down the road, where the Pup was waiting with the car.

"He is not back yet, Pup. I can't wait now. I've got to get through a call to London. But I want you to keep an eye on the place until I return. It is just possible that he is in the house all the time. Find out if you can, Pup."

"Yessir. Daresay I can find that out," and the Pup grinned genially in the semi-darkness.

Winston had to wait some time before he could get through to John Watt, the man he had charged to look up the Riley case.

"Hallo ! That you, Watt ? Barrows speaking. Did you get what I want ? Oceans of it ? Good. Interesting stuff you say ? Better still. Now look here, Watt. I want you to come down to Godalming to-morrow morning first thing. There is a train that leaves Waterloo about 6.30. Get that. It will bring you here about 8 o'clock. Yes, Godalming, I said. Come to the hotel. If I am not in, wait for me. Understand ? Right."

By the time Winston returned to the Pup it was half-past ten. The cottage was in darkness.

"His nibs 'as not come back yet, Gov'nor."

"Not returned !—at this hour ? Are you quite sure he is not in the house, Pup ?"

"Sure !" sniffed the Pup. "He may be



dead and buried, and again he may be getting married to the fair lady ; but he's not in that there 'ouse, Gov'nor." His tone conveyed much to the man who knew him. The Pup had his own methods of finding out what he wanted to know. His methods were sometimes decidedly novel—open to question even, but generally effective.

" Queer ! Decidedly queer ! " murmured Winston half to himself. " I wonder where he is ? "

" He's 'anging round them woods looking for things," suggested the Pup. " He'll be finding of 'em too if he doesn't watch out."

" Yes, I suppose so," returned Winston, who was anything but satisfied in his own mind. He roused himself. " Anyway it is time you were at home and in bed, Pup. We may be busy to-morrow."

Winston sat up a long time smoking innumerable cigarettes and turning things over in his mind. He was troubled about Elton, wondering if anything had happened to him after all. He had dismissed the attack upon himself the previous night as the revengeful act of someone who had a real, or fancied, grudge against him. He had not connected it with the Claremont case ; but now—he wondered——

It was nearly one o'clock when he turned in. He had had a long and strenuous day. But he was as hard as nails and had the inestimable gift of being able to sleep at will.

His head had scarcely touched the pillow before he was asleep.

The next morning, feeling like a giant refreshed after his sound sleep, Winston was seating himself at the breakfast table when Watt turned up.

"Good lad!" he cried. "Sit down here. I daresay you feel ravenous enough to begin on me after your pleasant little journey," and Winston grinned genially.

"You've said it," returned Watt. "That run down here is a fair appetiser. I hope the supplies won't run out before I'm satisfied, that's all."

Winston gave some orders to the waitress, whose fresh country face was wrinkled up into a generous smile. As she turned away he gave his attention to Watt, who had taken some papers from his pocket and laid them on the table. Winston turned over the papers until he came to a photo which immediately riveted his attention.

"I'll look through these after breakfast," he said, as he transferred the papers to his own pocket. "You can tell me the gist of it while we're feeding. Ah! here's the grub. You had better take the edge off that appetite of yours before you start on the story."

The waitress moved away, and for the next few minutes Watt was busy with his knife and fork. He drank a cup of coffee and poured himself out another.

"By Jove, that's good!" he said. "They



do you well down here. Those pork sausages now——”

Winston laughed.

“Nothing like a little morning exercise, eh, Watt? Now you’ve blunted the edge you need not wolf the rest. You can eat like a Christian and talk to me in between whiles. My appetite for knowledge has a razor edge.”

“Right. Now about Riley. It’s a nasty case. He got a girl into trouble and performed an operation. The B.M.A. had his name struck off the Register. He was a particularly brilliant chap, with a distinguished future practically assured. This affair smashed him. The girl was a friend of the Claremonts, in fact, young Claremont was fond of her and their engagement was expected. Old man Claremont wanted it. Riley met the girl at Claremont Park—he was a friend of Claremont’s stepson. Young Claremont, who was madly in love with the girl, was broken up over it. He went off to the war hoping for a friendly bullet. Within a week he was killed—some specially dangerous stunt he’d volunteered for. Old man Claremont, who was just wrapped up in this son of his, nearly went daft. He it was who brought the case to the notice of the authorities; he was determined to smash Riley, and he did it. This part about young Claremont was not in the paper, of course; at least, not about his being in love with the girl and his heartbreak and all the

rest of it. I got that from a chap in Harper and Braddell's. He knows all about them."

Winston stirred his coffee absently. "Claremont ! James Claremont !" he murmured. For a few minutes he sat lost in thought while Watt busied himself with toast and marmalade.

"Look here, Watt," said Winston, with a briskness that showed matters were shaping to his satisfaction ; " I'm sorry, my lad, that your country holiday has to end abruptly. You've got to get back to London immediately after breakfast. There are several things I want you to get busy about. Now listen," and he gave some detailed instructions. " You quite understand ? "

Watt laughed as he nodded in the affirmative.

" It shall be done," he said in a business-like tone.

" Then that's all. Now let us talk of something else."

About half an hour after Watt's departure, Winston proceeded to the Duttons' cottage. Here he learnt that Mr. Flemming had not returned all night. Mrs. Dutton seemed somewhat disturbed.

" I don't like it, sir," she said, " him not coming home like this. It's not that I'm frightened of losing my money ; for he's a nice-spoken young gentleman and free like with his money, and he paid me a week in advance. He only came on Wednesday ; so



I'm not out of pocket. But I'm wondering if something's happened to him, sir, him on his bicycle an' all. There's always accidents these days with these horrid motor-buses and things. No one's safe at all. I see the pictures of them in the *Mirror*—every week there's someone killed."

"I would not worry, Mrs. Dutton," Winston said soothingly. "He is all right, I am sure. He is not the kind to get run over. I daresay he has met someone he knows, or has gone sightseeing somewhere near by—Guildford, for instance. When the storm came on he must have decided to remain where he was for the night. He'll turn up to-day some time, Mrs. Dutton."

"I'm sure I hope so, sir. You've given me some heart."

"That's right." Winston was turning away when she added:

"You see there was another gentleman come asking for him this morning first thing."

Winston's footsteps were arrested at once.

"Someone else?" he queried.

"Yes; and he seemed quite upset when I told him that Mr. Flemming hadn't come home since yesterday."

"Some friend of his, I suppose. I wonder if I know him. Did he give his name?"

"No, that he didn't. Called me 'my good woman.' And he asked me a lot of questions; then he walked off huffy like, just as if I could help Mr. Flemming being away."

Winston smiled. He recognised the description.

"I think I know him, a tall, big man, red face, black hair going grey, bushy eyebrows that stick out?"

"Lor! That's him to a T, sir."

"Thought so. Well, I must get along. Don't worry about your lodger. I'll find out where he is for you."

"Thank you kindly, sir."

Once away from the cottage, Winston lost no time. He had left the Pup with the car at the top of the street.

"We'll get along to the woods just about as quickly as we can, Pup."

The Pup wagged his head sideways. He scented excitement, which was as the breath of life to his little Cockney soul.

"And, Pup," added Winston, "keep a look-out for Detective Inspector Mason."

"Crikey! Is he down here too?"

"Yes. But I would rather he did not know that we are here."



## CHAPTER XXV

### THE TRAILER TRAILED

**W**INSTON BARROWS ran his car well into the shelter of the wood.

"Listen, Pup," he said as he got out, then pushed the car further in between two bushes, "Mason is certain to be somewhere about here. He may have gone up to the house, or he may have taken it into his head to prowl round; so keep a sharp look-out. The ground is a bit damp after last night's rain. It is all right here; but it may give us away just where we turned into the wood. I noticed that it was a bit soft there. I'm going along to that little tor. Elton may turn up there again. Anyway I want to see him; so keep a look-out for him too—understand?"

"Yessir," replied the Pup briskly, with a side shake of the head. "Yer want to see 'is nibs, and yer don't want the tec to see you?"

"You've got it in a nutshell, old chap. Now see here"—and he pointed out a luncheon basket. "There are sandwiches and things here. When you are hungry, wade into them. We may be a bit late, and a

growing boy cannot afford to play pranks with his tummy."

The Pup grinned broadly, showing two rows of white, even teeth, and saluted.

"Thank yer, Gov'nor. You're a toff."

And that was an indication of Winston Barrows' care for the Pup ever since he had taken the little half-starved, under-sized waif into his service. The Pup was an invaluable little ally—many times he had proved of more use than a grown man. But Winston never forgot that he was a growing lad, and saw to it that he was properly fed, and had times of recreation between cases. At the beginning of the year his intellectual nourishment was to receive due attention. Being of an inquiring mind the Pup was already in possession of a fund of information that would have turned a Scotland Yard man almond-green with envy, and brought the waters of compassion to the eyes of a good padre.

Winston made his way carefully through the woods. The presence of Mason complicated matters. Notwithstanding Elton's precautionary measures, Mason had traced him to Godalming; it was a mere matter of time before he found the young man himself. But Winston wanted to see Elton before Mason got hold of him. And Clare Ashleigh?—Winston was more troubled about her disappearance than he cared to confess even to himself. He liked Clare, and her complete disappearance and absence from the inquest



was not consonant with his judgment of her character. There was something about her disappearance that needed explaining. Winston had begun to wonder if anything had happened to her. If she were out of the way—there, in the middle of the woods, Winston drew up short; an idea had just occurred to him. “I suppose,” he said half aloud, “that if anything happened to her Le Page would benefit. By George, what a fool I am! Why did I not think of that before?” As he continued his way the lines of his face were a little grimmer. Oh, yes. He was jolly well going to find out what secret those rocks held.

It was very tranquil, there was not a sound to break the stillness save the merry twittering and singing of the birds. After the heavy rain the air was fresh and laden with a sweet fragrance. The trees and bushes, cleansed of dust, fluttered their leaves gaily in the gentle breeze. The heat spell had broken and the temperature had fallen considerably.

Having found the same bush that had screened him the day before, Winston again took up his position there, hoping that Warren Elton would return. Only something of extreme importance had brought him to that spot, searching about amongst those rocks, and Winston Barrows wondered if he had arrived at an inkling of what that important thing was.

The immediate question was, had Elton been successful in his quest? If so, his return

was doubtful. Again, the papers the evening before gave the result of the inquest. Elton would now know that he was charged with the murder and that he was a badly wanted man. This probably accounted for his failure to return to the Duttons' house last night. To return there now meant instant arrest—Mason would see to that all right.

So thinking, Winston decided that Elton would be unlikely to come there that morning, and that he might just as well make a thorough search of the rocks—there might be an entrance to a hiding-place that he had overlooked in the evening light.

He had not taken more than a few steps with this object in view when a low whistle caused him to stop and look about him. To the uninitiated there was nothing to distinguish the whistle from the call of a bird. But to Winston it was a note of warning, a warning from the Pup. Thanking his lucky stars that he was not prowling about on the tor he began slowly to retrace his steps.

"S—sh!" came in the Pup's sibilant whisper. He half turned. The Pup was crouching behind a thick hazel bush. His finger was on his lips.

"You're being trailed, Gov'nor. He's over there," a grubby finger indicating the position.

Winston nodded. "Look out for Elton," he whispered. "Head him away from here." And Winston strolled on slowly in a direction



different to that taken by the Pup. There was a gleam in his dark eyes and a mischievous smile played about his mouth as he turned up his collar and pulled his hat well over his eyes.

"Trailing me, eh?" he thought. "Two can play at that game. I'll give him something to do, the blighter. He has spoilt my plans, and that means wasting time when time is jolly precious. I must get him away from here anyway. That's the stuff—get the trailer on the run. But first I must find out who he is—one of Mason's men, I daresay."

Instead of making for the tor, Winston now bore to the right, making directly for the spot where his watcher was. A snapping of a twig ahead afforded him infinite satisfaction. The man was making a hurried move. It was one thing to watch Winston; it was another to be seen himself.

Winston's movements became erratic. At times he seemed to wander about in a circle, as aimless as a lunatic. At length, however, he achieved his purpose. The other man had been hard put to it to follow Winston's capricious wanderings and himself remain hidden. At last Winston doubled swiftly on his tracks and obtained a glimpse of a sharp, pale face, a grey coat, and a dark felt hat. He smiled cheerfully and set off immediately at a quick pace for Claremont Park. It was some distance, but there was satisfaction in the knowledge that his trailer would have the long walk also.

His ring at the door was answered by Smithson.

"Good morning, Smithson," he greeted him. "Where is Johnstone?"

"Will you come in, sir. I'll call him."

"Wait," said Winston as the man was turning away. "I really want to see Mr. Le Page."

The man looked surprised.

"He's not here, sir," he replied. "He's away in America," and Winston could see that the man spoke in all good faith. "Sit down, sir, I'll call Johnstone."

Smithson was away some time. He returned alone.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "Johnstone must have gone out. He is not in the house just now."

"He must have been gone some time then; I did not meet him on the way."

"He just wanders about the grounds, I think, sir," volunteered the other. "Since the master's—er—death he has taken to doing that—is away for an hour or two at a time, sir. It's quite broken him up. You see he's been with the family a good number of years. This—er—trouble—the manner of the death, so to speak, has fair bowled him over."

There came another ring at the door-bell. Winston had not accepted Smithson's invitation to sit down. He had preferred to stand just inside the door. Now he moved to one



side so that when Smithson opened the door he was standing just behind it.

A man in a grey suiting stepped inside without waiting for permission to do so. Winston came forward smiling blandly.

"Hallo, Symonds!" he said. "I thought you would follow me here. It is a long way, but you've run me to earth at last, eh?"

The man addressed as Symonds opened his mouth the while he stared amazedly at Winston.

"You!" he ejaculated.

"I? Certainly. Whom did you expect to see?"

"But—but——"

"Just so. Good morning, Smithson. This gentleman wishes to see you, so I will not detain you any longer," and, pulling the door to after him, Winston made good his escape before Symonds had recovered from his astonishment.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### IN THE WARREN

CLARE put a shaky hand to her head in a bewildered way. Her hand came in contact with a bandage. She frowned. That was queer—a bandage ! Why was her head bandaged, and why was it aching, aching so dreadfully. Was she ill ? She looked about her in a dazed fashion. She was lying on a narrow bed amid strange surroundings. But she could not see very well ; the light was dim. There was a shaded lamp on a small table, but it was turned low. Other light seemed to enter as a shaft from the roof, a faint, ghostly light. Was there a skylight up there—or windows ? She could not see windows anywhere. But she was very tired ; so maybe it did not matter. Still she really would like to know where she was and why her head was bandaged. She did not remember this room she was in ; she was certain that she had never seen it before. Its walls were rough, of hewn rock and bricks—one wall was entirely of brick ; no wall-paper ; no colouring. It was like a cell. With a sudden cry she started up. Oh, God !



that was it. She was in a cell—a prison cell. She tried to raise herself as she looked about wildly. But the effect was too much for her head, and she fell back with a little moan of pain. The next moment she felt violently sick.

“It’s all right, madam. You are quite safe,” said a quiet voice beside her.

She turned her head slowly. How sick she felt ! The owner of the voice was an elderly man. His manner was deferential, almost deprecatory. His appearance struck some chord in her memory. Surely she had seen this man before—somewhere. She connected him with a small room . . . and whispering. Someone was whispering outside a door. . . . Her mind groped for a solution. Ah, of course ! It was coming back to her. Hawtry . . . the drive from London . . . the Lodge in the wood . . . the old servant . . . tea . . . something dreadful—oh, yes ! Her dreadful struggle with Hawtry Le Page, who was—oh, horrible !—the murderer of her uncle. He had tried to murder her too. She remembered falling . . . a crash as if the world had splintered into millions of atoms. And now . . . now. . . . If only her head would cease whirling round . . . and this dull pain . . . it hurt her to think.

“If you will just lie still for a little while, madam, I will pour you out a cup of coffee. You will feel better after that.”

He went to a small table and poured out

the coffee, and she saw him add something from a bottle—brandy, she thought it was.

She was glad of the coffee. It revived her. But the pain in her head was intolerable when she tried to sit up. She was thankful enough to resume a recumbent position.

"Will you please tell me where I am?" she asked, feeling as though she were in some dreadful nightmare. She wished she were, for in that case she would wake up.

Johnstone—for it was he—hesitated.

"You are quite safe, with friends, madam," he assured her. "You fell and hurt your head. You have been unconscious for some time."

"For some time! Then it must be getting late and I must go back to London," and she essayed to rise.

Johnstone put a respectful, but firm hand, upon her, pressing her back upon the pillow.

"You will do yourself much harm if you try to move, madam. You need rest and quiet."

"But I *must* get back. You do not understand. Just get me a car—I shall be all right."

"You wouldn't be, Clare, believe me, not if you tried to move about."

She started violently. Hawtry Le Page had entered the room quietly and was standing at the foot of the bed looking down upon her. His bearing was apologetic, conciliatory.

"*You!*" she exclaimed, her tone expressing horror and repulsion. She tried to rise to



her feet, swayed—Le Page caught her quickly, taking no heed of her weak struggles. Johnstone shook up the pillows and Le Page put her down gently.

“You must keep quiet, Clare. It is the only thing——”

“How dare you come near me, touch me,” she gasped; “you, a murderer!”

He recoiled as though she had struck him. His sallow face turned a sickly yellow. By an effort he pulled himself together.

“I’m nothing of the kind,” he exclaimed angrily. “How can you say such a thing—you who know me?”

“Because it is true.”

“Clare! You’re making a terrible mistake——”

“Mistake! Not I. Why, you tried to murder me as you murdered my uncle. You struck me on the head.”

The butler gazed at her aghast. Le Page made no attempt to move away.

“Don’t be silly, Clare,” he said. “I never touched my stepfather. As for you, you know I would not hurt you. You fell and knocked your head against the fender.”

“You caught hold of me and tried to kill me——”

“I merely tried to prevent you from going away and you fought like a wild-cat; then you slipped and fell——”

“Where am I now?” she broke in. “What place is this?”

“ Clare, believe me, you are perfectly safe and will be taken good care of until you are better. Honestly it is not safe for you to agitate yourself like this or to try and move about. Quietness is necessary. You’ve had concussion. A day or two’s rest and quiet will work wonders. Johnstone will look after you, and I promise to keep out of the way until you are able to see me.”

He looked across at Johnstone, who followed him from the room.

Clare, exhausted with excitement and distress, was thankful to be alone. She felt weak and ill. She had no idea of the time, but thought it must be getting late. Yet the light streaming in, as the light in a great cathedral, seemed a little brighter now. It was not so ghostly. There was even a glint of sunlight ; but it was just a little piece, and it struck the wall high up as though it entered at an acute angle. It puzzled her, that shaft of light. She must find out about it—later. She was too drowsy now. Her eyes closed. . . . Someone held something to her lips. . . .

When Clare next awakened she was feeling much better. Her head was still aching ; but her mind was clearer ; it was not such an effort to think.

She sat up and looked about her curiously. What she saw did not tend to reassure her. The room, simply but comfortably furnished as a sleeping apartment, was nevertheless a rock-hewn cell. But why was she in a cell ?



This was not a hospital. She had never seen a hospital like this. Then why had she been brought here? What was Hawtry Le Page's object? If she had fallen and hurt her head why was she not kept at the lodge and a doctor and nurse sent for? Was it because he was frightened of being questioned—of being seen? Did he fear arrest for the murder of her uncle? Surely that must be the explanation. And she was brought down here to be out of the way lest she inform on him. She could scarcely reconcile this man of fear, skulking in caves like a frightened rabbit, with the polished and courtly dancing-partner of Trinidad. He was so smooth, so poised; his ease of manner bearing the stamp of good breeding. But she supposed anything was possible in a man fleeing from justice, a man who could take the life of another, and that other one who had stood to him in the place of a father. In all the months that she had known him—and she had seen him almost daily in Trinidad—she had never seen anything in him to suggest the sudden rage that he had exhibited to her in the lodge, and which had all the irrationality of the lunatic.

Fighting against the dizziness that assailed her as soon as she attempted to stand up, she staggered across the cell and stood under the aperture in the roof, leaning the while against the wall for support. The aperture ran the whole length of the cell, its width varying from about six inches to a foot and a half. But

there was no glimpse of the sky to be seen. She turned a troubled glance around the cell. Wherever could this place be? It was surely down in the bowels of the earth—it smelt musty and dank. Yet it seemed dry enough. Anyway she did not intend to remain there hiding like a rat in a hole. If only she did not feel so weak and ill! There were two doors in the room. One led to a tiny bathroom. She closed that again and groped her way slowly to the door through which Johnstone and Le Page had entered. It was fast shut; her efforts to open it were unavailing.

Then real, stark terror descended upon Clare. She was a prisoner down here under the ground, and her jailor was a murderer! In her fear she beat wildly with both hands upon the door, crying, crying for help.

The door was opened immediately by Johnstone, whose distress at her condition was evidenced by his expression of dismay.

“Oh, madam,” he begged; “won’t you please lie down. You will make yourself very, very ill. I was just bringing you some nourishment.” He was carrying a small covered tray.

But Clare’s one idea was to get away, to escape; to get up to the fresh air of heaven; to have the sunlight, and the blue of the sky over her head. Then only would she feel safe.

As Johnstone entered the room she passed him. He made no effort to detain her and she soon understood why. Her cell merely led into a second which was occupied by Hawtry Le



Page. He was seated in a large easy chair, and had evidently been reading, for a shaded lamp stood on a table close beside him and a book lay on his knee. Her cries must have alarmed him ; for he was leaning forward with anxious gaze fixed on the door. At Clare's appearance he sprang to his feet in consternation.

"Clare!" he exclaimed. "You ought not to be moving about. Here, take this chair and—ah, that's right, Johnstone. Bring that broth here."

Clare was thankful for both the chair and the broth. Her knees were giving way beneath her, and her head was paining desperately again, paining and very heavy—it was making her feel stupid. But she simply must find out Le Page's designs towards her. An evil known could be faced and grappled with. It was the unknown that she feared.

"You really must not take liberties with yourself, Clare," said Le Page, and his tone betrayed anxiety as did the keen glance he bestowed upon her. "You must lie down and have absolute rest——"

"Rest!" Her tone was contemptuous, derisive. "What rest can I have here? I want to know by what right you are keeping me a prisoner in this horrible place—your warren?"

He threw her a swift, startled glance.

"Warren? What do you know about a warren? What do you mean, Clare?"

"You know well what I mean," she

retorted. Her natural courage was returning now. The broth—sticky, strong broth it was—had given her a little strength. She also felt somewhat reassured to know she was not to be left alone in the bowels of the earth. The immediate answer to her call proved that. “But let that go,” she continued. “The point is that I wish to leave this place immediately.”

“I am sorry, Clare. I am indeed. But that is impossible just at present. You are not fit to travel to London. It would do you infinite harm. I would not take the responsibility. I have told you that absolute quiet and rest are essential if you are to get better. It is the truth. As for being a prisoner, that’s rubbish.”

“Then why was my door locked? And if I am not mistaken that door is also locked”; indicating a door immediately opposite the one leading to her sleeping apartment.

“You are not mistaken,” he told her coolly. “The reason it is locked is solely for your protection. You could not find your way out of this place unaided—there are passages leading in all directions; but were you to go wandering about, ill as you are, well, as I’ve told you, I, for one, am not risking it.”

“Would that not be an easy way out for you?” she asked scornfully. “You have got rid of my uncle, now I suppose you want to get rid of me. Otherwise you would take me up to the light of day where I could have proper medical attention.”



His brow darkened with anger. His temper, never mild, and now fretted by the events of the last few days, was becoming more difficult to control.

"Why the deuce do you keep harping on that string?" he cried angrily. "You know it is all a confounded lie. And if I wanted to get rid of you, why should I do everything in my power to cure you? Can you tell me that? As for medical attention, you are getting it. I thought I told you that I had passed out before I took up flying—so that's that!"

"No. I did not know," she said slowly. Her face, white enough before, was now ghastly. Was not the murderer of her uncle one who had medical knowledge? Oh, it was horrible.

But Le Page was speaking.

"Look here, Clare; I hate to appear a cad in your eyes. You know well that I would not hurt you for the world. But naturally a man does not want to be accused of murder. You didn't like it yourself, I'll warrant, when you were detained on suspicion. Oh, yes, I read about it. I felt dreadfully upset about it."

"Not sufficiently upset to come and take my place," she said quickly.

"How could I when I am as innocent as you are. Innocent men have been hanged before to-day. For your innocence to be proved afterwards does not avail you once you're dead. I merely want to keep you out of the way for a few days until they find the man

who did kill my stepfather ; at any rate until after the inquest."

"Inquest!" she echoed in a startled tone. "I had forgotten. Why, what day is this—how long have I been here?"

"You came here last night. This is Thursday, the day of the inquest."

"But I should have been there. Do you realise what you have done?"

"Quite. Kept you from denouncing me."

"Is that the act of an innocent man?"

"The act of an innocent and wise man," he returned impatiently.

Her straight glance held his.

"The wisdom of the serpent," she said in a quiet tone that brought a dull red to his face.

"To save yourself you have put me in a false position and possibly fixed the guilt on me."



## CHAPTER XXVII

“ MASON! MASON! ”

ONCE outside, instead of making at once for the woods, Winston hurried around to the wing of the house and, slipping behind a stone abutment, waited. A few minutes later Symonds came hurrying round the corner of the wing.

Winston frowned. Was he coming in his direction? If so—No! Winston nearly hurried in his relief. With one hurried glance about him, Symonds made off into the woods. With the smile of a jubilant schoolboy, Winston set off after him. He trusted that he had effectually shaken off the man.

It was important that Winston should be free to act for the next few hours without having Mason or his man on his heels. He need not have revealed his identity to Symonds ; but of two evils he had chosen the least. Since the man had seen someone near the rocks he would have hung on like a leech, believing that he trailed Elton. There would have been no getting rid of him until Mason came to make his arrest. Mason would have looked like a perfect ass of course, and Symonds

would have learnt how very saccharine and agreeable Mason could be under the influence of disappointment, but what satisfaction would Winston have got out of it if it had been the means of Mason learning more than was good for him?

He had succeeded in shaking off Symonds, but now Winston wanted to know if the man's suspicions had been aroused concerning the rocks. However, Symonds did not go in that direction at all; he kept to the left. As Winston was about to follow for the second time that morning, a low whistle mingled with the notes of the birds. It came from the right. He turned in that direction. The next minute he saw the Pup's small body worm its way towards him.

"All right, Gov'nor," he whispered. "He's going to 'is car—Tec Mason's car it is. It's some way from ours. Mason's collared ours—saw our marks at the mushy place and traileed 'em. He can't do much 'cos 'ere's the key," and he handed the key to Winston. "He thinks it's 'is nibs's," and the Pup's mischievous grin would have brought an answering smile to the face of a corpse. "He's waiting to collar 'is nibs when he come to collect 'is car. He'll wait though, Gov'nor; for 'is nibs is in the Lodge——"

"What! Elton?"

"Yessir. Not the big place at the entrance to the Park, but a dinky little place—yer call it a box, don't yer? Well, it's there. I've



'idden his bike to make it a bit safer like—Mason won't find it afore he draws 'is next pay ; and 'is nibs won't either.”

“ By George! Good work, Pup,” exclaimed Winston approvingly. He stood for a moment thinking.

“ See here, Pup. I don't want Mason to get on to Elton if it can be avoided ; but I can't afford to lose Elton myself. I'll have to get the car, I suppose. Symonds will tell him it's mine, and he will wonder where I am and come searching. Now you cut back, and be ready to show me where to turn the car in from the road. Mason will be certain to follow on my heels, worse luck. If I don't see you I'll know that you're on to Elton and will find the way myself. But don't lose Elton. Stick to him like glue, Pup.”

“ Yessir. I'll stick. The place is right over this side. Yer can turn in where the fence is broken if I'm not there. But the place is some way in from there.”

“ Right oh, old man! ”

The Pup disappeared, and Winston turned away with a smile. The Pup had scratched for a living with the London sparrows. The living had been of a meagre sort ; but the intimate knowledge that he had gained of certain parts of that great city was an education—of a sort—in itself. Since Winston Barrows had taken him under his protecting wing he had had many opportunities of gaining a fair knowledge of the country also. For health reasons

Winston often sent him into the country between cases, and he could find his way about with the sureness of an animal. As for lightness and fleetness of foot, or for trailing anyone in the thickest woods, he was like an Indian. His little Cockney body could worm its way anywhere. Moreover, when necessary, he could look as innocent as a cat purring by the fireside ; yet his impudence and courage were colossal when occasion demanded.

Winston went on to where he had left his car. As he was stepping in, Mason rose up on the other side.

" Ah! " exclaimed the detective-inspector, in a tone expressive of the liveliest satisfaction.

" Oh! " returned Winston with a cheerful grin.

" *You!* " exclaimed Mason.

" I? Of course it is I, old friend. Who else? By the way, Mason, you might just take that stone away from the front of the wheel ; it will save me having to get out again," and his smile broadened as he looked down into the stormy face of the discomfited man. " Thanks," as Mason kicked the stone away with a superabundance of energy.

" What are you doing here anyway? " asked Mason surlily.

" I? Oh, I wanted to find out if Le Page had returned yet," replied Winston with an appearance of candour. " I am sure he could tell us quite a lot if we could only see him. What brought you down? "



“ Where’s Elton? Can you tell me that? ”

“ My dear Mason, be reasonable. How can I tell you? ”

“ You’re supposed to be acting for him. ”

“ True. But he did not think it necessary to keep me informed of his whereabouts. Do you know where he is? ” he asked innocently.

“ He hasn’t thought fit to keep me informed of his movements either, ” returned the inspector with sardonic humour.

“ Too bad of him when he must know of your anxiety to lay hands on him. ”

“ I’ll lay hands on him to some purpose before long, ” said the other irascibly. Mason’s temper was becoming very uncertain these days. This was due to the elusiveness of the young American who seemed to have the power of vanishing just when Mason’s hands were outstretched to grasp him.

“ Then you know where he is? ” put in Winston with a keen glance.

“ Perhaps, ” hinted the inspector darkly.

Winston’s smile was bland.

“ You old rascal! You’ve got him; is that it? ”

Mason grew really angry.

“ Look here, young feller-me-lad, ” he said with asperity: “ I let you in on this case, and now I believe you’re double-crossing me. Egad! If you are—— ”

“ Mason! Mason! ” murmured Winston with lazy nonchalance. “ I wouldn’t have thought it of you; I wouldn’t really. ”

"Thought your grandmother!"

"Not at all. I have some hazy recollection of giving you my word."

Mason had the grace to look ashamed.

"Well, I can't understand what you're up to, and that's all about it."

"Oh! is that what's troubling you? Why did you not say so? I'm trying to find out who murdered Claremont. And, by the way, I rather think I can safely promise to hand him over to you to-night."

"What!" shouted Mason. "You mean that? Then you do know where he is?"

"I think I do," replied Winston cryptically. "Now you be round at my place in Gower Street at eight o'clock to-night, and—No," he hesitated. "That won't do. My landlady would have two dozen fits and would give me notice if I had a murderer arrested at her house—we're respectable at Gower Street. I can't risk a notice for such a dear, trusting friend as you, Mason——"

"Get along with it," growled the inspector, turning the colour of a red sunset.

Winston chuckled. "Let's say Linden House then. Scott will cut up rough, of course. He says he will be ruined over this. But as Linden House is already in the limelight, a little more cannot do much damage."

"And what then?"

"It's up to you. I'll have your man for you."

"Good lad! Knew you'd play the game."



Winston shook his head sadly.

“ Mason! Mason! ” he said.

The inspector looked sheepish and therefore foolish. Sheepishness did not sit easily on his fleshy bulk.

“ You might as well take me back to London with you, young feller,” he said, with his hand on the handle of the door.

Without any appearance of haste, but with definiteness of purpose, Winston placed his hand on the door.

“ Charmed, old man,” he said, with a whimsical smile. “ But it would be rank unkindness to ‘ Jane ’ to ask her to take your seventeen stone when Symonds is waiting just along there with your own capacious vehicle. Ta-ta! Until our next merry meeting,” and the next minute “ Jane ” was gliding swiftly through the woods towards the open road, and Mason was standing looking after her with his mouth wide open.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### CLARE LISTENS AT THE DOOR

**I**T was Johnstone who assisted Clare back to her own apartment. When Le Page sought to help her she waved him aside with a gesture of loathing. He laughed sardonically and turned away with a shrug of his shoulders and outflung hands. His time would come, so he told himself.

Once back in her room Clare lay down, thankful beyond measure to put her aching, reeling head on the pillow. She was quivering in every nerve, and so overcome with weariness that she seemed to be sinking through the bed—just sinking, sinking. She realised that Le Page had spoken but the truth—absolute quiet and rest were essential to her just now. The agitation caused by her talk with him had sapped her strength as the sun sucks moisture from the earth. Hammers seemed to be beating inside her head—thud, thud, thud—dazing her.

Johnstone, who had left the room once he had seen her safely back on her bed, now returned with some liquid in a glass.

Clare's heavy eyes regarded it with suspicion.



He shook his head. "It is all right, madam," he said gravely. "It will do you good."

Clare gazed up into the man's face. What she saw there reassured her. He at least was not deceiving her. She drank the draught; then fell to wondering whether Johnstone would help her to escape. She had gathered the impression that the old man disapproved of her imprisonment down there. But would he so far act against his master's wishes as to liberate her? Perhaps not. Well, she could at least put it to him. It was worth trying. She would see about it as soon as her head ceased revolving, ceased spinning . . . thudding . . . It was quieter now. Everything was slipping, slipping from her. . . .

After that things became vague. Whether she lived through eternities of time she did not know. Maybe she was just dreaming. Once or twice she became dimly conscious of a nebulous person giving her something to drink, of voices that sounded faint and far away. And once she thought she screamed out—an evil, abhorrent presence had approached her.

She woke up. The shaded lamp on the table was turned low. The little cell, except for the soft glimmer of light round the lamp—was in darkness. Clare wondered drowsily if it were night-time. Even as the thought flitted through her mind she slept again. Thus the hours passed, and the treatment that Le Page caused to be administered to her had its beneficial effect.

When next Clare awakened she felt better and stronger. Again the pale shaft of light was thrusting into the cell from the opening in the roof. For a few minutes she just lay there quietly thinking over the events of the last few days, in fact since the very hour when, walking down Torrington Square, she was regretting that adventure passed her by. Adventure had come leaping to meet her from the moment she entered her attic sitting-room.

Suddenly she became conscious of voices in the next room. Turning her head, Clare perceived that the door leading to the next cell was slightly open. She could not hear anything of the conversation, as the voices were low, coming to her as a continuous murmur like the sound of wind through trees. Then her own name was pronounced clearly, distinctly. Johnstone had spoken it. They were discussing her then, and from Johnstone's expostulatory tones he was in disagreement with his master. Clare's decision was taken in a flash. She was going to hear what they were talking about—she might learn Le Page's intentions towards herself.

Quietly she slipped off the bed. How she had gained in strength! She waited a moment, then stepped across to the door and listened.

"It is not fair to treat her so, Master Hawtry," came in Johnstone's voice. "She's a fine young lady, and the old master's own niece."

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Le Page. "Who



said I was going to hurt her? I'm not likely to hurt the girl I'm going to marry, am I?"

"But—but, Master Hawtry; it's not fair to marry her when you—you——"

There came a sound as though Le Page had sprung hastily to his feet.

"Look here, Johnstone," he exclaimed, in his anger forgetfully raising his tone; "I'll not stand that from you; do you hear? You've got it into your head that I murdered my stepfather. Well, get it out now once for all. You must be mad to think of such a thing: you're as bad as that girl in there. But you ought to know me better—murder! I! If I had done it I would just as lief tell you straight out as not, for you would never give me away——"

"I never would give you away, Master Hawtry, whatever you did," broke in Johnstone earnestly. "Why, I have seen you grow up from a little bit of a chap—you've been like my own; if you'll excuse my taking such a liberty, sir. I taught you your first cricket, and you always came to me with your troubles——"

"I know, old fellow. You always were jolly decent and helped me out of many a scrape. That is why I've come to you now that I'm in this confounded hole. But I'm jolly well not going to have you suspect me of murder—that's a bit too strong. I don't deny that I was there that afternoon—for which piece of damned folly I'm paying now, having to skulk

down here like a miserable rat. But how was I to know the girl would be out and that the old man would come along the moment I left, and someone else come along and kill him? Who can fight against luck like that? Once let the police know that I'm in England, and that I was there that afternoon, and they will arrest me out of hand. I'm not taking any chances, thank you."

"But, Master Hawtry, surely you could prove——"

"*Prove!* Oh, come off it!" Le Page's voice was brittle and intensely bitter. "They would do the proving—prove my neck into the noose. You told me yourself that one of those damn detectives suspects me and collared my photo." Clare gave a little start. So that was how Winston Barrows became possessed of the photograph he had shown her. "And that man—" continued Le Page, "I daresay it is the same one—knows that I went to Trinidad to get that girl to marry me, and that she refused me. Pleasant—what?"

"But, Master Hawtry, why bring the young lady here? It only makes everything worse."

"Why, you old fool; didn't you hear her accuse me? She believes me to be the murderer and threatened to denounce me—she would do it too. I did not intend to bring her here until she got hurt and there was no other way out. I meant to have taken her away that same night. I'm going to marry her whether she likes it or no, and you've got to help me."



“ But Master Hawtry, you cannot force the young lady to marry you against her will——”

“ That’s all you know about it,” broke in the other savagely. “ I’ve tried to get her in the conventional way and it didn’t come off. Now I’ll try another way and, well, I don’t think she will turn me down again.”

“ Wha—what do you mean? Oh, sir, you wouldn’t——”

“ I’m taking her away to-night,” returned his master coolly. “ The ’plane has been ready since Wednesday.”

“ Oh, don’t do it, Master Hawtry! ” pleaded the old butler. “ For God’s sake don’t do it, sir. You dare not—you must not——”

“ Don’t be such a squeamish old fool, Johnstone. I’m not going to hurt her. She’ll be all right once we are married. We were jolly good pals before and will be again once she knows that I had nothing to do with the murder. Why, the girl inherits every darn thing, while all I have to live on is my father’s inheritance—which isn’t much—and the few thousands the old man settled on me when I came of age. I’m not giving up Claremont if I can help it. Besides I want the girl, and she’ll give in when cave-man methods are used—girls really like that sort of thing.”

“ Not this young lady, Master Haw——”

“ What’s that? ”

Clare, in her anxiety not to miss a word, had inadvertently touched the door and it had creaked. Fortunately she had no shoes on her

feet—in a second she was back on the bed with her eyes closed, to all appearances still asleep.

Hawtry Le Page looked down on her suspiciously, while Johnstone, who had lingered near the door for a moment, now stood near by. His hands were shaking ; his face was very white, very haggard.

“ You were an idiot not to shut that door securely,” said Le Page, frowning his rebuke. “ I wonder if she heard anything ? ”

“ She is still asleep.”

“ But is she ? I’m not so sure.”

Then Clare moved drowsily as if aroused at the sound of their voices. She simply could not feign sleep any longer. Her waking seemed natural enough. She opened her eyes and looked about her dreamily, then as if suddenly aware of Le Page near her, she showed such hostility and repulsion that he decided it were wiser to leave the room.

“ May I have something to drink, please, Johnstone ? ” she murmured.

“ Certainly, madam. You would like some tea ? I’ll have it ready in a few minutes. One minute, madam,” he excused himself. He left the room to return a moment later with a small glass and spoon on a miniature tray. “ Now if you will just take this chicken essence to go on with while I’m preparing the tea. It’s a thick jelly ; it’s been on the ice.”

“ Ah, that is good indeed ! ” she said, smiling up into his face. As he received the



glass dish from her she put an urgent hand upon his sleeve. "You'll help me, won't you, Johnstone?" she whispered.

For answer he slipped the key of her door under her pillow.

"Lock your room to-night, madam."

"Thank you," she breathed softly.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE LODGE IN THE WOOD

ONCE out of Mason's sight, Winston Barrows let "Jane" go. Even though he had promised to hand over the "wanted" man that night he knew Mason would never let him out of his sight if he could help it. Mason's idiosyncrasies were not hid from him. Fortunately "Jane" had the road to herself, for Winston simply put her to it. Just before he turned the corner of the road he looked back. Mason was following. Winston took the corner on two wheels. Almost immediately he heard the Pup's whistle, followed a moment later by the Pup himself. The boy showed his teeth in a mischievous grin as he sprang on to the foot-board with the nimbleness of a young goat.

"Pup, Mason is on our heels."

"Just where he would be," returned the Pup imperturbably. "Turn in by that tree, Gov'nor. That's the trick. Ground's as 'ard as his 'ead 'ere—no marks at all. The tec'll think 'Jane's' struck a bomb; he'll be looking up in the sky for 'er bits and wondering why they don't come down. Now turn 'er



in this way, Gov'nor. She'll do it. Jane's only a little 'un, Jane is. The woods 'ere are as thick as the 'air on yer 'ead. Mason'll want it cleared for his furniture van."

They had penetrated far into the wood before the Pup jumped to the ground.

"I think yer could shove 'er in there, couldn't yer?" "There" being a thick clump of hazel bushes.

"Just the thing. Now we'll pull these bushes over her—so. That's the best we can do. Elton still at the Lodge?"

"Rather! It's empty and was locked up. His nibs broke through a winder—opened it with his penknife, perfeSSIONal like. But he locked the winder after he got in."

"I see. Well, if he can get in I daresay we can also."

The Pup shut one eye and looked slyly at Winston through the other.

"What's the bettin', Gov'nor?"

Winston laughed.

"I can safely leave it to you, Pup."

"Right y'are."

The Pup led Winston to the picturesque, creeper-covered Lodge that Clare had admired—from the outside. They went round to the back of the house, where the grass and bracken had encroached almost to the door. The Pup, whose education had been on unconventional lines, took some strange-shaped pieces of wire from his pocket, along with a couple of bull's-eyes. He gave one of the sweets a

sampling lick, smacked his lips with intense satisfaction, then returned the bull's-eyes to his pocket for future delectation. The wire he inserted into the keyhole with the casualness born of experience. A minute he listened with the air of a terrier listening for rats. "It's all right, there's a mat inside," he whispered. Then he opened the door.

After a hasty glance inside, he nodded to Winston, who followed him in. The Pup picked up the key from the mat and put it in his pocket.

"Pup, you had better keep watch outside in case Mason comes. He's bound to stumble on the place once he comes in this direction. I don't want to be taken by surprise, you understand."

The boy gave a knowing wink. "Yessir," he said.

The room into which Winston had entered proved to be a kitchen. It was fully furnished, and from its general appearance seemed to have been in use quite recently. Everything was spotlessly clean and dustless. The fireplace was free of ashes; but on one side of the hearth was a scuttle of coal, and on the other a small heap of chopped firewood. Over against a tiled portion of wall stood a blue-flame stove on which was a kettle and a small saucepan. Winston lifted the lid of the kettle. It was half full of water. Into this he dipped his finger, then raised his eyebrows whimsically—the water was tepid.



"Tea and boiled eggs," he commented inwardly. "For whom? Le Page? By George, if it is!"

Thoughtfully he pushed open a door leading into a back passage; then stood and listened. Silence! The house was hushed as though under a spell of sleep. But suddenly into the silence came a faint tapping, tapping. Winston stood still, listening. The tapping appeared to come from a small room further down the passage, on the opposite side to the kitchen.

As quietly as possible he approached the door of the room. It was ajar, and as Winston was quick to perceive, had been forced open. Going nearer he peered inside. Immediately his interest was riveted. The room proved to be a small but well-stocked store-room. That was of small account. Not so the man who was on his knees tapping the floor with a small hammer—tapping, and listening. So concentrated was he on his self-appointed task as to be unconscious of Winston's nearness.

"What on earth are you doing here, Elton?" Winston asked sternly, entering the room as he spoke.

Elton spun round as if struck by a bullet, then seeing who it was, he exhaled a deep breath and smiled in a relieved way.

"Gee!" he exclaimed, sitting back on his heels. "I thought it was the cops."

"They are outside," returned Winston

coolly, looking keenly into the young man's face.

"*What!*" Elton sprang to his feet, and his healthy face lost some of its colouring.

"Say, you don't mean that, do you?" He gave a quick, nervous glance towards the door.

Winston nodded.

"But there is time for you to answer a few questions before they arrive."

"Not on your life. If the cops are coming I'm quitting right now." He made a sudden dash to the door.

Winston Barrows put out his foot, and before Elton could recover his balance, he had pulled the door to and was standing in front of it.

"Now, question one. Why did you ask me to act for you then clear out without letting me know where you had gone?"

"Are you handing me over to the cops?"

"I'm putting questions to you which I want answered before you leave here. Now then."

Elton looked at Winston as though he were calculating his chances of overthrowing him. He decided against trying it. Although the younger man was no mean antagonist, it was evident to even a casual eye that the advantage lay with Barrows. Winston smiled. He knew so well what was passing in the other's mind.

"Don't waste time, Elton," he advised.



"I posted a letter to you yesterday, telling you what I was down here for; I also sent one to Clare under cover to you."

"Ah! Well, I am glad you did write. Unfortunately I must have left London before the post."

"That's no reason why you should double cross me and get me arrested," exclaimed the other hotly.

"Perhaps not. But you laid yourself open to suspicion, my lad. You ask me to act for you then start in to play the goat and waste my time."

The American surveyed the elder man with a wide-open look. Then with an impulsive movement he thrust out his hand. "I'm real sorry, Barrows. I see your point. The fact is I made up my mind quite suddenly to leave the Russell—guessed the police would soon get wise to my whereabouts once they had my cuff-link with my initials. I went to Bayswater meaning to let you know; but the next morning the papers gave the name of the murdered man. Gosh! That fair tickled my spine for me——"

"But why should you get the wind up over that?" asked Winston, watching him narrowly the while.

"Land sakes! I was the luncheon visitor who failed to turn up. Didn't you know?"

"Oh, yes; I knew," replied Winston tersely. "And why did you not keep your engagement?"

"You can ask that! Why, I forgot the whole darn business when I read the morning papers—about the murder in Clare's room, and Clare being detained, and all the whole ghastly affair. I guess I had something else to think about other than lunching with Claremont or anyone else."

"Quite so. Go on."

"Well, I didn't want to be arrested for murder in this darn country. I hadn't done it anyway. But I would have to convince your police of that and I was not quite sure I'd be up to it. In any case they would turn the key on me while you were looking for the other chap. Say, have you got on to him?" His eyes questioned Winston's eagerly as he put the question.

"We've got no one yet. But of course you know there is a warrant out for you?"

Elton nodded gloomily. "Oh, I know it all right," he said. "And I don't get one thrill of joy out of it. But your police chaps have fallen for the wrong man this time. I've beaten them at their own game," he jibed. "Those Scotland Yard chaps think they're almighty clever, but"—here the boy's face took on a steely hardness—"to save Clare, and to save my own neck I'm going to put them wise to who did murder Claremont. He's down here. I wrote you all about it, telling you to come along and get him."

Winston chuckled.

"Hawtry Le Page, I presume?"



Elton gazed at the other man in admiration.

"Well, you're slick, anyhow. But, here, what about those cops? I'd better quit. I don't want them to come and find me here."

"What's your fear if you know that Le Page is the guilty man?" And Winston looked into the young American's face with a half-humorous expression.

"Say, it might be funny to you—I don't see the joke myself. I'd have to prove it. And if I'm copped——"

"You won't be copped—yet awhile anyhow. What made you suspect Le Page?"

Warren Elton gave another uneasy glance towards the door, then he cast a searching look into Winston's face. His own cleared. He gave a sigh of relief as he explained.

"I got a hunch when I read that he was Claremont's stepson and supposed to be still in N'York. You see I knew he was here—we came over on the same boat. Another thing. I told him that I was going to see James Claremont about the Elton cars, and he never let on who he was."

"Dash it all, Elton, that's a bit rough on a chap! Because a man is decently reserved with a stranger you accuse him of murdering his stepfather!"

"That's what you say. But would an honest-to-goodness innocent man burrow into the earth like a darned rabbit?"

"Well, all right. We can't go into that just now or the police will be here, and Mason

has a yearning to put his hand on your shoulder. I want to know about Miss Ashleigh—where is she? ”

An expression of amazement swept into Elton's face and he regarded the other man strangely.

“ Don't you know? ” he asked, and something of fear had crept into his tone.

“ I ! No. I'm asking you. She was not at the inquest.”

“ I read that. But I thought that you had got her away—to keep her out of it. Didn't you? ”

It was Winston's turn to show sheer bewilderment.

“ I ! ” he exclaimed indignantly. “ Well, I'll be hanged ! What do you take me for? ”

“ I thought you were trying to help her in case they——”

“ Help her to break the law ! Dash it all, you have some queer notions in your head. She was subpoenaed to attend the inquest, and ought to have been there—and that's all there is to it.”

“ Then—in that case——” For a moment Elton stared at the other man. “ Is there anything wrong? ” he asked. “ Say, has anything happened to Clare? ” And as anxiety got its grip upon him all thoughts of the police officers passed from his mind.

“ You really don't know where she is then? ”

“ No.”



"Hum!" observed Winston thoughtfully. His mind was already forging ahead, putting two and two together. "I wondered. It was this chiefly that brought me down here." Then he gave Elton a very brief explanation of what had occurred.

"But what could have happened, Barrows? That does not sound like Clare—she's such a straight kid." He stood biting at his lips nervously, thinking; his face pale and troubled. "Say! There's something at the back of this," he exclaimed after a moment. "Something's wrong. We've got to find Clare right now——"

"We'll find her all right," said Winston grimly. He was angry and troubled; troubled for Clare's safety; angry with himself for taking it for granted that Elton was at the bottom of it all. And yet, how much sooner could he have come down here—the inquest had taken up the whole of yesterday morning. But he might have handled matters differently when he arrived.

"I counted on your knowing," he said.

"But——"

"Never mind now—we're wasting time. You're looking for Le Page in some underground passage, I take it?"

"Yes. But what about Clare?"

"This is Clare," returned Winston with strong emphasis. "Now don't ask questions and waste time—just answer. Have you seen Le Page down here?"

“ Three times—twice near some rocks, and——”

“ Those rocks you were searching yesterday ? ”

“ You saw me ? ” Elton’s tones expressed the astonishment that was his.

Winston nodded. “ Yes. Go on.”

“ Le Page disappeared there—both times.”

“ You are certain of that—that he did not get away into the woods on the other side ? ”

“ Dead certain.”

“ All right. You think there is an underground passage ? Yes ? Why look for it here ? ”

“ I ran him to earth here this morning. He entered this house, but never came out again. I got in through a window, and a door slammed just about here. I found this door locked on the inside.”

“ Ah ! Was the key on the inside ? Yes ? That’s good enough for me.” Winston thought rapidly, then said :

“ This may take some time, Elton, and Mason may arrive any moment now——”

“ Damn Mason ! ” ejaculated Elton savagely.

“ Quite—I agree. It would be quicker to get the butler to talk ; but we might miss—— No, this is safer. Listen, Elton. When we find Le Page we shall find Clare Ashleigh.”



## CHAPTER XXX

### UNDER THE GROUND

“**W**HAT!” cried Elton, shocked beyond measure. “Find Clare with Le Page!” His eyes, fear-filled, anguished, stared at the other man. His face had turned a ghastly white. He swallowed painfully. “Barrows,” he said in hoarse tones; “if Le Page took Clare away, he has—has murdered her as he murdered her uncle. Oh, *God!*” and he turned away, his shoulders sagging, the hammer that he had been unconsciously twirling in his hand before dropped to the floor.

“Here, steady lad!” exclaimed Winston sharply. “Pull yourself together and don’t talk rot. She’s no more murdered than I am.”

He was in truth desperately anxious himself; but he saw that Elton was in danger of going to pieces in his fear for Clare’s safety. He himself did not fear for Clare’s life; but—there were other things. Le Page wanted Claremont. The only way to obtain this was by forcing Clare to marry him. In Winston’s mind was the remembrance of the cry he

had fancied he heard the previous evening, a cry of terror in a woman's voice. He had not been really sure, for the thunder had crashed just then. Afterwards he had put it down to imagination. Now his doubts returned. Was it Clare crying for help? The thought was too horrible to dwell on.

"Did Le Page see you?" he asked abruptly.

"He saw someone—that's why he turned tail. But I'm certain that he did not recognise me."

"Well, let us get busy."

He now cast a trained eye round the room. "The entrance is not down there," he said with conviction. "Those bricks are fixtures. That," indicating the other side of the room, "is an outside wall—not enough space anyhow. This cupboard is the most likely place."

The cupboard in question occupied part of an inner wall, the rest of the space was taken up with shelves filled with stores. The cupboard was a fixture reaching to the ceiling and of generous proportions.

"This may be his hiding-place," said Winston, as he sought to turn the handle of the door. "This cupboard would hold half a dozen persons. The door is locked, anyhow—on the inside perhaps." He took an electric torch from his pocket and turned its light into the keyhole. His eyes glinted strangely in the light of the torch. "We are on the right track, Elton," he said softly, exultantly. "The key is in the lock. Now where is some-



thing to force the door? Good! the very thing."

Elton had found a tool-box in which he was rummaging.

"This is house-breaking, young man," said Winston Barrows grimly as he picked out a chisel. "Two years at least for both of us."

"It can darn well be anything it likes so long as we find Clare," replied Warren, who was in a fury of impatience to find her, and to get at the man who had brought her here. He had not taken to Le Page when they met on the boat; he had summed him up fairly accurately. The thought of Clare at his mercy in this underground prison made him pretty nigh see red.

There came the sound of splintering wood. The next minute the door was open. Winston turned the light of his torch slowly along the length of the cupboard. The place was lined with shelves on which were blankets and house linen. But the cupboard was empty so far as Le Page was concerned.

"He is not here, anyway. But doors don't lock themselves, Elton; so we are getting warm."

"Gee! you are cute, Barrows. I never thought of the cupboard. These shelves seem to be fixtures——"

"The floor is our place, I think." Winston turned the light on the flooring. "See, wooden floor—that's the stuff!"

Down went both men on their knees, feeling,

tapping. Solid as rock. Further along were some loose mats lying in some disorder.

"Now, I wonder——" Winston smiled as he tossed them aside. He tapped. The sound came back hollow. Inch by inch he examined the floor. "Found it!" he exclaimed tersely. As he had expected there was a join in the boards, a join round four sides of a small square.

"Oh, gee! That's fine——"

"It will be when we get it open."

For a moment Winston Barrows sat back on his heels thinking.

"It must be worked by a spring," he said thoughtfully; "otherwise how does it open from this side? There is nothing a monkey could get hold of."

Winston had been directing the light slowly along the floor and the lower part of the wall, and feeling for any protuberances.

"There doesn't seem to be anything here," he said, speaking more to himself than to his companion. "There is nothing to press; no handle to turn—how then is it worked?"

Elton was on his knees beside him searching eagerly also. His attention was suddenly caught by something on the wall just under the lowest shelf.

"Say! Turn the light here a minute; there's something immediately under this shelf. There—what's that? Oh, *Boy!*" Elton's voice rose shrill and he almost fell forward in his haste to seize hold of an iron



crank about four inches in length and a couple of inches in width.

"That's it all right," cried Winston, whose excitement almost equalled Elton's. "Pull it, man! Pull it!"

That was all very well. Elton pulled. He set his feet against the wall and pulled; but nothing happened. "Darn it!" he muttered savagely. "It won't work."

"It has jolly well got to, and that's that!" retorted Winston doggedly. "Let me try."

He gripped and pulled in his turn, but with like success.

"Hum! It won't pull; there is no room to turn the thing—Where is that torch? Turn the light along here—to the side. Got it!"

Winston now pulled the handle sideways. It slid easily as in a well-oiled groove. Immediately followed a muffled rumble, then a snap. "That's done the trick," he said with a little grunt of satisfaction.

The square piece of flooring had swung back, disclosing some narrow stone steps. On the under side of the trap-door, near the outer edge, was fastened a chain that passed down the door and under the floor.

Winston put a restraining hand on the eager young American. "You had better wait a moment, Elton," he suggested wisely as he prepared to descend the steps himself. "I must see if we can work the thing from the inside. We don't want to be trapped down there."

Elton agreed immediately. "Sure thing. That wouldn't help Clare any."

He peered down the hole watching Winston as he descended. When six or eight steps down, Winston turned his light about. It was then that Elton noticed the revolver in his hand.

"Stand clear a minute," came Winston's whisper. "I'm going to work the thing."

Elton moved away from the opening. Then came the sound as of the winding of a chain and the flap of wood descended. It was fast shut, and the crank had slipped back along the groove. Again the rumble, the snap, and the trap-door was open.

"It is all right," whispered Winston. "A most ingenious device. But there is no time to bother about it now—what's that?"

He was up the stairs like a shot. They listened. There came a faint sound as of a door being gently opened and shut again.

"The cops!" and Elton rushed the steps, almost knocking Winston backwards.

Winston recovered his balance. "Wait, you young idiot," he whispered. "You'll break both our necks, and it's not the police. I know who it is. Take the light and wait at the bottom of the steps."

He handed Elton the torch, then went swiftly outside and across to the door of the store-room. Came a low whistle, scarcely more than a breath.

"Pup!"



The Pup came swiftly towards him.

"Mason's coming."

"How soon?"

"Some way off yet."

"Quick. This way."

He led the Pup into the cupboard and showed him the open trap-door. "See. This is how it is worked. Understand?"

"Yessir," breathed the Pup, whose eyes were nearly popping out of his head with astonishment.

"Right. Is there time for you to get out without Mason seeing you?"

The Pup nodded.

"Bring the car round to Claremont Park; but don't let Mason see you. If I don't show up there within an hour and a half, bring help."

Again the Pup nodded. The next minute came the faint click of the back door. A minute later came a rapping on the front door.

Winston grinned genially as he pulled the pantry door to, then shut the cupboard door as best he could. The next moment he passed down the steps. Even as the flap settled back into its place they heard the back door open and heavy footsteps enter the house.

## CHAPTER XXXI

“ HANDS UP! ”

CLARE sat waiting for Johnstone to return with the tea. Her hands were clasped tightly about her knees, her eyes stared straight in front of her, but seeing nothing of her surroundings. From her demeanour, calm and cold, and still as any statue that was ever carved in marble, no superficial observer would have imagined that she was moved to the depths of her being by profound anger and a fierce resentment. And yet the unusually straight lines in which the beautifully shaped, sensitive mouth was set, and the hard steeliness of the blue eyes were revealing to one who understood. Le Page might plan her undoing ; plan ruthlessly, callously, to do her deadly wrong ; but he had no real knowledge of the girl he had to deal with ; no idea of the strength of will that lay beneath her calm and quiet exterior.

Although her head still ached dully, her improvement since the previous day was marked. She felt more mistress of herself, and with returning strength came confidence, the fixed determination not to fall like a helpless



trapped bird into his hands. He had taken her by surprise on Wednesday afternoon ; she had been totally unprepared to cope with his tremendous physical strength. But there would be no unpreparedness to-night, Clare told herself. Le Page would anticipate dealing with a drugged, helpless girl. Clare smiled—it was not the smile her friends knew—and her eyes rested with approbation on the key in her hand.

Clare intended to be neither drugged nor helpless. With that key she could defy Le Page. A mere key would not deter him from his purpose, she knew : for Le Page was a rageful man, and would try to force the door. But neither Le Page nor anyone else could do that in the twinkling of an eye. This door had been built in the “ good old days ” when doors were meant to withstand the onslaughts of rageful men. The outer door was modern—she had noticed that ; that was a different proposition. But supposing—supposing he had another key ? There might be a hundred and one unexpected developments. Well, Clare would not be entirely unprepared ; she would defend herself with any weapon to hand. There was just one sure and certain thing in Clare’s mind as she sat there looking now at the door, calculating its strength, its power of resistance, and that was—Le Page’s plans concerning her would never be fulfilled. She had only to hold him back, delay things long enough and surely Winston Barrows would

come. His suspicions of Le Page were already aroused ; finding him was only a matter of time. Clare had an unbounded faith in Winston Barrows. He had inspired her with confidence, not only in himself personally, but in his abilities. He was not the type of man one connected with failure. Clare wondered if Winston thought that she had run away, that she was too cowardly to face the inquest. She frowned. That thought was distasteful. It wounded her pride, her sense of honour.

She leaned back, loosening her clasped hands from her knees, and regarded the crumpled condition of her green dress with distinct disapproval. She had not been out of her clothes since Wednesday, and Johnstone had told her that it was now Friday. She frowned again. Her blue eyes glinted angrily. Le Page ought to know that a girl could not live and move and have her being in one set of garments. It was not even decent. But her discomfort mattered little to him at the present juncture, she supposed.

Johnstone returned with the tea, and afterwards Clare bathed in the tiny bathroom that Johnstone had already prepared for her use. There was not much that she could do with her crumpled clothing beyond shaking it out thoroughly. But after she had dressed, and breakfasted on a couple of boiled eggs and the thinnest of bread and butter, she felt refreshed and in better mettle to face whatever awaited



her. Johnstone was assiduous in his attentions, plying her at intervals with some form of nourishment; and Clare, knowing that she would need every ounce of strength, took it all gratefully. Once he brought her some rare old wine, mellow as sunlight, rich and soft as velvet. Clare turned searching eyes upon him.

“Did *you* pour it out?” she asked significantly.

The old butler flushed and nodded. His voice when he answered held a nuance of sadness, and something of shame.

“You may take without fear whatever I bring you, madam,” he said quietly. “This wine is very old and will put strength in you. I will be very careful, madam,” he added in a low tone.

Her eyes met his in a flash of understanding.

“Thank you!” she murmured, with a smile of grateful acknowledgment.

Her sympathetic glance followed him from the room. Poor, faithful old man! He looked so broken; so pallid and—under his deferential manner—so unhappy. She hoped that it would be in her power to reward the old butler in some way. And yet what could she do? Clare was wise enough to know that Le Page, however bad he proved, would ever remain the “Young Master” to Johnstone. She realised that the old man was torn by conflicting emotions; for while he was quite ready to sacrifice himself to serve “Master Hawtry,” he was too decent a man to sacrifice a girl.

Clare sighed. She felt keenly sorry for Johnstone, and her resentment burned more fiercely towards Le Page, the author of all the trouble.

She took her chair and placed it under the opening in the roof. The air was fresher there, not so dead and dank as on the other side of the room. Her thoughts turned to Warren Elton. He had appeared on the horizon of her life in the most fantastic manner, and from that moment had followed tragedy and the most extraordinary events crowding in one upon another. She seemed to have lived years since that hot, sultry Monday evening. And so she had—reckoning by experience ; though this was only the fifth day in actual time.

Thoughts of Warren's perilous position troubled her profoundly. So much might have happened since Wednesday. Had he been arrested?—the mere thought of it brought dismay! She must ask Johnstone the result of the inquest—perhaps he would let her see a paper. He was in the other room talking with Le Page just now, but——

Into the quietness came a loud imperative knocking that brought Clare to her feet with the abruptness of a spring released from pressure. She stood for a bare moment listening, bewildered by the suddenness of it. Then as a thought flashed across her brain, with a swift, silent movement she sprang towards the door and inserted the key in the lock. She was not a moment too soon, for with



her movement there came a sudden quick rush in the other room, and Hawtry Le Page flung himself furiously upon the door seeking an entrance.

She had succeeded. But how very nearly had she been too late! She stood panting, her hand still on the lock, while Le Page beat upon the door like a madman, calling upon her to open it.

The knocking outside continued, and a voice demanded admittance. Its sound came muffled to Clare now that her door was shut. And still Le Page raved and entreated Clare.

“Open the door, Clare,” he cried, his voice, which he endeavoured to keep low, hoarse with terror. “Quickly! It’s our only chance. Damn you, you little fool! Open it, I tell you.”

Though he had forfeited all right to her pity, at that moment of stress, Clare found it in her heart to pity him. But trust him again she could not, and she was in ignorance of the exit from her room leading to the tor in the woods. As he stood crouching outside her door alternately pleading and cursing, Clare leaned upon the door within listening for the sounds beyond, her eyes shining with eagerness, with expectation, for surely here was help at last. Winston Barrows had found his man and had come with the police. It must be so, or why Hawtry Le Page’s panic of fear?

As if in answer to her thoughts someone called, “Stand clear!” This was followed by a muffled report, then a crash and a loud

rending and tearing which ended in a louder crash. Clare knew then that the outer door had given way.

Followed an acute silence that was startling, though it lasted but a bare second of time. Into this silence, cutting with the quality of steel, a cold voice rapped out.

“Hands up!”

And suddenly Clare felt overcome with a deadly nausea. Her lips were trembling. Now that Hawtry's arrest was accomplished she hated it—it was horrible! She shrank from being a witness of his downfall. It was one thing to anticipate his arrest while she was his prisoner down here in this horrible warren of his; it was another matter now—and this man had once been her friend——

She could hear Le Page expostulating in furious tones. The terror had left his voice. Now that the worst had happened his fear had given place to a passionate anger.

“Cut it out!”

She recognised Winston's voice; but it had the quality of flint.

“Just run over the other one,” she heard him say, and supposed he must be speaking to one of his men. “Nothing there? Right. Get over into that corner, Johnstone. Just look after him while I run over Le Page. All right. You get over there with Johnstone. You can put your hands down. Now, Le Page, where is Miss Ashleigh?”

“Miss Ashleigh? How the devil do I know?”



I only arrived in the country last night. Who is she anyhow? ”

“ Now isn’t that interesting? ” came in an American voice, and Clare’s hand moved trembling on the key of the door. “ You sure haven’t forgotten our dandy trip over on the *Majestic*, Le Page? ” continued the same voice. “ I thought not. Now just refresh your memory a little more and tell me where Clare—Miss Ashleigh Claremont—is.”

At the sound of that clear American voice, Clare hesitated no longer. She opened the door and stood upon the threshold gazing in upon them. For but a moment she stood there, but what she saw became engraved upon her memory for all time. Le Page and Johnstone were in the far corner of the room. The latter, who was standing near his master, seemed to have shrivelled up in his despair. His shoulders sagged like those of a very old man ; his hands clasped each other as though to still their trembling. Le Page had flung himself into a chair. No, there was nothing craven about Le Page. His attitude was rather one of cool insolence as he stretched out his hand to a table near by and helped himself to a cigarette. Winston Barrows stood between the two men and the broken door, and, as in a flash, Clare’s eyes travelled from his stern, set face, to the weapon in his hand. Standing close to Le Page was Warren Elton. He looked white, and the lines of his mouth were grim and ugly.

"Where is she?" he demanded harshly, bending over Le Page as though he would knock the cigarette from those cool, insolent hands, the sneer from the lips. "What have you done with her? My God! if you've hurt her," came a sudden ejaculation from Winston, and Elton looked up. With one stride he was across the room.

"Clare!" he cried, and the break in his voice told something of his relief. "Oh, *Girl!*" and in a moment he had her in his arms and was holding her as a man holds his most precious possession. And Clare, proud, sweet Clare, just looked up into his face and smiled.

"I'm so glad you have come," she said simply.

"Sure thing! But say, honey girl, what have they been doing to you? Why this bandage round your head, and you're all white and shaky like a pale lily flower. Sit down here," and he led her to a seat. "We'll have you out of this rat-hole in two minutes."

Winston Barrows nodded to her and smiled. How great was his relief to see her none but he knew.

"Glad we have found you, Miss Ashleigh—Miss Claremont I should say, I suppose? You have given us a bad time."

"I am sorry—I couldn't help it."

"Thought as much," he said. "Now just tell us in as few words as possible why you



were absent from the inquest, and how is it that we find you here."

Clare related what had happened. She spoke simply, stating the bare facts.

"And that bandage—how do you come by that?"

She flashed a swift glance towards Hawtry Le Page, who was looking at her, a faintly ironical smile on his mouth as he removed his cigarette and blew some smoke through his lips.

"I—I fell and struck my head on the fender."

Winston Barrows smiled grimly and put a few astute questions. Clare being no match for him, he soon knew all that was to be known of that unpleasant scene in the Lodge on Wednesday evening.

"A pretty pair," was his comment. "Like master, like servant," and his glance swept from Le Page to Johnstone, who was now standing with one shaking hand on the back of a chair for support. His grey face, lined and haggard, was turned anxiously upon his young master.

"Oh, don't blame Johnstone," cried Clare earnestly. "He had nothing to do with it." In a moment she had sprung up and crossed over to the old man and laid her hand upon his arm. "Sit down, Johnstone," she said kindly to him. "You look quite ill with worry." She turned again to Winston. "Mr. Barrows, we have only thanks to give to

Johnstone. He has been so good and splendid—he has taken such care of me. He gave me the key too, so that I could be quite safe. I owe Johnstone a great debt of gratitude.”

Winston Barrows threw her a quick, searching glance.

“I see,” he said. “I am glad he was here. We had better be getting along now.” He turned to Johnstone. “Show us the way out of here, Johnstone—the way to the house. The police are waiting at the Lodge.”

“Who are you then?” exclaimed Le Page with quick suspicion.

“Winston Barrows, Detective,” said the other imperturbably.



## CHAPTER XXXII

### A MESSAGE FOR MASON

**I**N the meantime Mason and Symonds had followed close on Winston's tracks. Mason fully relied on Winston's promise to hand over the murderer of James Claremont that evening. Winston's word was good enough for him at any time. But Mason was a hard-headed policeman who had learnt the truth of the old adage, "There is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." A "wanted" man had been known to slip through fingers even at the last minute, and it was not Mason's habit to leave anything to chance. He had traced Warren Elton to Godalming, so why should he not make the arrest himself down there? Why wait to have him handed over like a parcel that evening? And in Torrington Square forsooth! Barrows knew that Mason had a warrant in his pocket. What then was his motive for heading that slippery young man back to London before arresting him? And because he knew that Winston Barrows was not fool enough to risk losing his man for the sake of a dramatic hand-over on the scene of the crime, he was

convinced that he had something up his sleeve. That "something" puzzled Mason; and Mason disliked being puzzled. It irritated him until he mislaid his temper. He had lost it completely by the time he and Symonds had jumped into their car with the intention of keeping Winston well in sight.

Following in the wake of "Jane" they turned to the right. There they lost all trace of her.

"He's somewhere about here," exclaimed Mason savagely. "This is where he turned off—it's the only likely-looking place, and there is no way out through the woods on the other side."

Mason was not quite accurate in his assumption. Winston had left the road further on. Consequently Mason and his companion wasted much time looking for traces of "Jane" in a place where "Jane" had never been. They never did find the car, but their search brought them ultimately to the Lodge.

Mason gave a low whistle of surprise and satisfaction and hastened his footsteps. He had not known of this little cottage hidden away in the heart of the Claremont woods. It opened up a new field of speculation, and already Mason began to see glimpses of light where previously there had been darkness.

"Bet he has gone in there, Symonds," he said. He was beginning to regain his natural good humour now that success seemed near.



"Shouldn't wonder," agreed his satellite. "Barrows has not been hanging round these woods for his health."

Now Mason was too good a policeman to force an entry into anyone's house unless his action was justifiable. For all he knew there might be a caretaker, in which case he would have a nice tale to tell if Detective Inspector Mason, of Scotland Yard, were to break in upon him like a tramp. So Mason sent Symonds to the back of the house to ensure no one leaving that way, while he knocked at the front door according to orthodox methods.

There being no reply he peered through the windows ; tried each one in turn to see if it was unlocked, and in due time came upon the window that Elton had forced. Elton had locked it again, but the marks of his activities remained. Mason's eyes bulged at this pleasing piece of evidence. He began to put two and two together to see if they would add up even.

It was unfortunate that the Pup had not found time to lock the back door before his hurried departure. He had barely cleared the intervening space between the door and the nearest sheltering bushes before Symonds appeared. When Mason came round he found that Symonds had already opened the back door. Once inside they made a comprehensive search of the place and at last came to the pantry. Mason's glance was immediately arrested by the splintered cupboard door.

“Hello ! What’s this ? ” he ejaculated, his eyes now glinting like sparks of light. “See here, Symonds. This is Barrows’ doings or I’ll eat my head—he has no scruples, that young feller.”

Mason was now in the position of a terrier within sight of a rat that is just beyond his reach. He could see his quarry—almost ; but he could not lay his hand upon him. He was as sure as a man can be that Winston Barrows had come here. He was equally certain that he was responsible for that splintered door.

Mason stood for a moment scratching his head while he thought the matter over. He was no fool. He put two and two together again, with the result that he and Symonds did much the same as Winston Barrows and Elton had done some time before. But it was only Mason’s bulldog proclivities that kept them to it, for a good hour had passed before the cupboard yielded up its secret.

By the time they arrived at the cell lately occupied by Hawtry Le Page, Mason had the whole story clear in his mind. The young American evidently knew Claremont Park well. He had been aware of this secret passage and had made use of it as a hiding-place. “And a dashed good hiding-place too ! ” was his inward comment.

“What about this, Symonds ? ” he exclaimed exultantly, almost falling upon



Clare's green hat, which she had forgotten at the last minute. "This is that hat the girl bought at D. H. Evans's when she gave you the slip—the little huzzy ! I knew she was with Elton. And that young feller, Barrows, said she was innocent. Huh !—those blue eyes of hers got him properly. He's a nice sort of feller, is Barrows ; but he won't be quite so cocksure of himself after this."

And Mason sniffed and, metaphorically, patted himself on the back because he had been proved right after all, whereas Winston Barrows had had to crawl down over the nice-looking American boy too. He had been so certain of his innocence. The hasty judgment of youth—that's what it was. When Winston had added a few more years to his age he would know that looks and pretty manners did not count in these things.

It was Symonds who first caught sight of the note propped up on the table.

"Hallo ! This is for you, Inspector."

"Eh ? For me ? "

Mason literally grabbed at it. And as he read his big red face grew redder and set in grim lines. It ran as follows :

"Dear Mason,

"Please do not waste too much time here. It is interesting, but unproductive. I would hate you to be late for your appointment at eight o'clock. I am depend-

ing on you to take over our man. By the time you receive this I will be well on my way back to London.

“Chin ! Chin !

“W. B.”



## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE END OF THE TRAIL

**I**T was still wanting a few minutes to eight o'clock when Winston Barrows, accompanied by Warren Elton, arrived at Linden House. Annie Long, who saw them through the dining-room window and recognised Winston, opened the door for them.

"Is Mr. Scott in his office, Annie?" inquired Winston.

She nodded in the affirmative. "Shall I tell him, sir?"

"No. Don't bother, thanks, Annie. I'll go and see him."

He found the proprietor seated at his table writing. Winston wondered if he lived at his table and whatever he found to write about all the time.

"Good evening, Scott," he said. "I'm afraid I will have to trouble you once more. There are one or two things I want to ask you about, and it is necessary to see those attic rooms again. Are they locked up? Yes? Then kindly open up for us—Mason will be along in a minute."

"I shall be thankful when the police have

finished with this house," remarked Scott as he led the way upstairs.

"Not more so than the police themselves," returned Winston grimly.

"I suppose not. You chaps have your side of it too. Have they got that young American yet?"

"As good as."

"Huh!" came a disgruntled protest from Elton, who followed behind.

Barrows half turned his head and frowned in warning, whereupon Elton subsided into silence.

Scott opened the door of the sitting-room and they entered. "The bedroom too—shall I open that?"

"No. That will be unnecessary," replied Winston. "But it is stuffy here. You might have that window open, Scott, if you please."

Scott was propping the window open when Mason arrived. At the sight of Warren Elton sitting at ease and drumming a little tune on the table as if he had not a care in the world, Mason's hair fairly bristled. He had not seen this much-wanted American before, but he had his description, and was certain this was he sitting there as coolly as though he owned the place and everything in it.

"Ah! So you're here at last, are you?" he said truculently.

"Sure thing!" replied Warren, smiling genially. "We haven't become acquainted yet, have we, Inspector?"



Mason looked him up and down as a mastiff might look at a terrier, that is, he intended to eye him thus, but broke down on Warren's cheery smile.

"None of your lip, young feller," he retorted. "We are going to become acquainted right enough." He had come close to Warren now. "I have a warrant for your arrest——"

A couple of policemen appeared in the doorway as if by magic. Winston Barrows waved them back.

"Not yet, Mason," he said laconically. "Elton is not your man."

"Eh! What's that?" exclaimed the astonished inspector, scarcely able to believe his ears.

"He is not your man—I told you that before. Don't worry. He will be here all right. I am expecting one or two others in a few minutes; but before they come I want to tell you the whole story. Sit down, Scott. Sorry to keep you; but I'm sure you will be interested to hear about it."

As though unconsciously, Winston took up a position where he commanded a full view of the doorway and the passage immediately beyond; at the same time he made an almost imperceptible sign to someone outside who nodded in the affirmative. He then began his story.

"This story," he said, "deals with the motive for the crime. It goes back some years, to 1914-15 to be precise. There was a certain

young surgeon of the name of Riley. He was a brilliant young man with the prospect of a distinguished future before him. This young surgeon was a great friend of Claremont's stepson, Hawtry Le Page, and a frequent and welcome guest at Claremont Park. Claremont's own son, Geoffrey, was engaged to a ward of his father's, the daughter of an old friend of the family, who had died some time before, leaving his daughter in Claremont's care. Claremont had held this old friend in great esteem, and there had been a deep attachment between the two men. The marriage between the daughter of the one man and the son of the other had been desired by both parents, and when the engagement took place it naturally received the unqualified approval of Claremont. I hope I am not tedious? "

"Go on," said Mason tersely.

A dead silence pervaded the room. The atmosphere was tense with expectation of the unknown. A little group of men in the passage had gathered quietly near the door, held there by the command in Winston's slightly raised hand. He proceeded with his story, his words falling with singular distinctness in the stillness.

"Now this is where Riley comes into it. This young girl to whom Geoffrey Claremont was engaged was very innocent, very beautiful, and very young—not more than seventeen. Geoffrey was only twenty-two. Riley



fell madly in love with this young girl, got her into trouble, and—er—well, he performed an operation. She did not die then, but the whole affair combined to kill her. She died less than a year later. It broke Geoffrey Claremont up completely. He went to the Front hoping a bullet would finish him. He volunteered for a desperate—practically hopeless—job, and got the death he wanted.”

The clear voice ceased for a moment or two, and in the pregnant silence one could have heard a pin drop. Winston allowed his glance to wander to the three men seated in the room with him ; so still and tense the attitude of each they seemed like figures carven in stone, except for their eyes, which were intensely alive and riveted upon him . . . waiting. . . . And in the doorway the group of men, motionless, their gaze turned upon him . . . also waiting . . . expectant. . . .

A slight hardness had crept into his face ; it was evident in the low, clear voice as he resumed his story.

“ James Claremont,” he went on, “ swore to ruin the man who had been the cause of all this misery. He pushed the case against him, and Riley was struck off the Register by the B.M.A. In fact Riley was a ruined man, professionally, socially, and financially.

“ He in his turn swore to have revenge on Claremont. That would have ended with the threat in all probability had not Claremont

come here to visit his niece last Monday. He knocked at this door and was told to enter. He did so expecting to see her. Instead he saw Riley standing near the window. They were both shocked with the unexpectedness of it. Riley, with all the fiery, passionate temper of the red-haired Irishman, immediately saw red. If you remember"—he looked towards Mason—"Annie heard someone say, '*You!* Oh, my God!' The voice was thick with passion. It was Riley. Claremont evidently turned to leave the room, but Riley, in his blind rage, grabbed up the kris that was lying to hand and plunged it into Claremont's back. That is what happened, eh, Scott?" He rapped out the question suddenly, the words sharp and metallic like bullets falling on a roof.

There was a jerking movement—a gasp. Scott's face was white as chalk. He had the appearance of a man who has died. At Winston's question he jerked upwards as though galvanised back to life.

"You—you devil!" he snapped viciously. Then by a supreme effort he sought to pull himself together. "How should I know?" he asked with badly simulated carelessness. But his hands were working and his eyes roved to the door.

"Better than anyone else, I take it," said Winston quietly, raising his hand to those waiting outside in the passage. "You forgot



that this window is overlooked by the window opposite, Scott."

Scott sprang forward as an animal springs, then suddenly cowered back, back, and his eyes held a desperate, hunted look as they met the grave, calm gaze of Sir Henry Galloway, the great specialist of Harley Street. Behind Sir Henry was Hawtry Le Page, who had followed him, accompanied by Watt. From his position in the passage Le Page had not been able to see Scott who, by Winston's manœuvring, had been seated with his back to the wall behind the door; neither had he been told for what reason he had been brought there that night. As he entered the room immediately behind Sir Henry Galloway, his eyes fell upon the crouching man to whom he appeared as the very Nemesis of fate. He stopped short.

"Egad—Riley!" he exclaimed.

Scott sought desperately to recover lost ground.

"You—you mistake. My name is Scott," he said thickly, moistening his dry lips. "I am the proprietor," he added.

Le Page shrugged his shoulders.

"That may be, and you may call yourself any old name you please, but you were Riley when I knew you."

"You mistake—it's a conspiracy——"

"There is no mistake," came in the clear, decisive accents of Sir Henry Galloway.

"This man was at Bart's with me—Patrick Riley."

"It's a lie!" shouted Scott, his voice rising hysterically, and looking about as though for some means of escape.

"Your man, Mason," said Winston quietly.

Scott made a dash forward, but Mason, who had moved round beside him, put out his hand. There was a click. . . .

Winston stepped forward and catching hold of Scott's left arm, pushed up the sleeve.

"See," he said. "It is easy enough to dye one's hair; but this sort of thing does not change—Riley all right." On the inside of the forearm was a dark brown birthmark in the form of a crab.

. . . . .

The following morning Clare, pale, but dainty and sweet in her dove grey dress, was seated on the couch in Winston's office. Her grey hat rested upon her knee, her uncovered head, shining like straw-coloured satin, rested against a pile of cushions he had deftly arranged for her. Beside Clare was Warren Elton reading the cable message in his hand for the umpteenth time.

"Good old Dad!" he said in a tone expressive of extreme satisfaction. "I knew that he would catch the first boat. He will sure think you hustle some over here, Barrows," and his joyous, infectious laugh was good to hear.



"Perhaps it is just as well for your comfort, Elton," observed Winston drily.

"You bet. I wouldn't like to sample Mason's grip."

Clare turned to Winston.

"Were you able to come to some arrangement with Hawtry, Mr. Barrows?"

He nodded. "Yes, everything is settled satisfactorily. He leaves to-day for a prolonged visit abroad. I think you were wise to act as you have done."

"It is better so. Thank you, Mr. Barrows. And—may we see the Pup, please?"

"Certainly."

"You are sure going to lose that Pup of yours, Barrows," said Warren. "He would do real fine in America."

Clare was aghast.

"Warren! How selfish of you to try and take the Pup away from Mr. Barrows."

Warren chuckled as he caught Winston's quiet smile.

"You wait, honey," he told Clare.

Winston touched the bell on his table, and a moment later the door opened and the Pup came in.

He wished the visitors good morning in an impersonal way, winked at them, then stood to attention before Winston's desk.

"I think that Mr. Elton has a proposition to make to you, Pup."

"Yessir." He turned to Elton, waiting; his bright, bird-like eyes were very wary.

"Pup," said Warren, "would you like to go to America to learn big business, and become a rich man?"

The Pup looked him all over in a leisurely way.

"Thank yer, sir," he replied patronisingly, "but I do big business along with Colonel Barrows, who was an awfficer in the British army and has medals—heaps of 'em." He finished off with a grimace, followed by a wide, friendly grin, and turned to Winston.

"Anything else, sir?"

"Not just now, Pup," replied Winston gravely.

A loud knock at the door smothered Elton's "Gee whiz!" and Clare's merry laugh. As Mason entered one door the Pup disappeared like a streak through the other.

"I've just looked in to hear all about it, young feller-me-lad," said Mason genially, his countenance one expansive smile.

"That's right. We have been expecting you."

"We?" Then he caught sight of Clare and Warren seated on the couch. "Oh!" said Mason lamely.

Winston laughed; and there was a cheerful smile on an eager, boyish face.

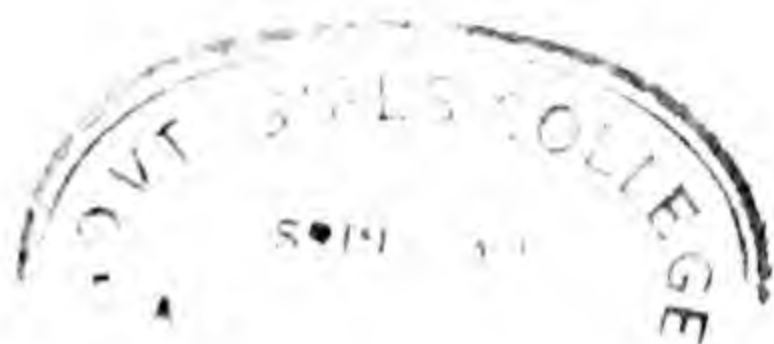
"Come right along in, Inspector," invited Warren with a welcoming gesture. "We are not shy, you can take it from me. Clare and I are not a bit frightened of the law, English or American."



Mason grinned sheepishly.

"There, there now," he said soothingly as he heaved his great bulk down into a chair. "You are a cheeky young beggar, and everyone is liable to make a mistake sometime or other."

"Sure thing ! Shake Mason."



THE END





# HERBERT JENKINS' NEW 7/6 NOVELS

## LONDON LIGHTS

By VERE LOCKWOOD. Author of *Son of the Turk*.

On the death of her father, Claudia Marsh finds herself left with practically nothing, although accustomed to wealth all her life. A chance encounter in a London café brings love into her life, and many are the exciting adventures she experiences before she finds her haven of desire.

## TESSA

By RICHARD STARR. Author of *The Fifty-Fifty Marriage*.

Tessa is as lovable a heroine as ever Mr. Starr has given us. Working for a huge firm of caterers, her life is none too easy, but Jimmy Turner soon came along and made all that different. However, there are the inevitable misunderstandings and set-backs, making this an intriguing and absorbing story.

## HER PRIVATE MURDER

By JAMES CORBETT. Author of *The Vampire of the Skies*.

By her deeds of the past, Pamela Gordon was bound to Sir Robert Henderson, the wealthy bachelor owner of the "Daily Sun." But John Orkney, who was investigating a murder case, tried to drag her from her former life and start afresh. A thrilling story of love and revenge.

## THE HOUSE OF DREAMS

By MARGARET BEHRENS. Author of *Miss Mackay*.

Mrs. Behrens has a charm of writing that is all her own, and this new book is full of those little whims and fancies that make her stories so delightfully fascinating. Peopled with appealing characters, it has a plot intricately worked out through many amusing situations.

## EXIT SILAS DANVERS

By PATRICK LEYTON. Author of *Within Twenty-four Hours*.

A strikingly original story. Roddy Danvers had inherited Shatterton Hall and a comfortable income by the will of a dead cousin, whose only son was reported to have been killed in Mexico ten years before. But Silas, of course, turns up—and then the murder is done. There are many thrills and a startling climax.

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# HERBERT JENKINS' NEW 7/6 NOVELS

## BINDLE OMNIBUS

By HERBERT JENKINS. With introduction by P. G. Wodehouse.

Bindle needs no introduction. The cockney furniture-remover is a popular hero of fiction the world over, and suffice it to say that here are the five Bindle books in one volume—Bindle, Mrs. Bindle, The Adventures of Bindle, The Bindles on the Rocks, and The Night Club—truly a big bundle of Bindle.

## THE MANY-COLOURED THREAD

By LUKE ALLAN. Author of *Blue Pete: Halfbreed*.

An interesting character-study of some Americans, first in California and then in the Balearic Islands. "Hall" Ridout comes into some money, and he and Milly Boyle leave America and take a villa in Mallorca. Later they move to San Semola, where they meet Virginia Crossen and Standish Burnham—and trouble.

## THE LOVE OF IRENE

By ALAN E. PORTER.

A fine story of English family life in the suburbs, where young married folk struggle to keep the home going through hard times, illness and many set-backs. A rather depressing theme, perhaps, but a powerful story, well told—a fine saga of its class.

## THE MARRIAGE FOR THE DEFENCE

By ROY VICKERS. Author of *Deputy for Cain*.

Tessie did not kill her husband. Nor did Rodney, her former fiancé, who still loved her. But all the evidence pointed to a crime of passion—and the chief witness against them was their own love. A moving love story in a true-to-life, highly dramatic setting.

## SLADE OF THE YARD

By RICHARD ESSEX.

John Darrell, M.P., is accused of unforgivable conduct in public, though remembering nothing of it. So he volunteers for a job at the yard, under an assumed name, and experiences hair-raising thrills and escapes before everything is explained and adjusted correctly. A fast moving thriller that grips from beginning to end.

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# HERBERT JENKINS' NEW 7/6 NOVELS

## MADMAN'S MANOR

By CHARLES RUSHTON. Author of *The Trail of Blood*.

For twelve months Lady Nobell's husband had been missing, in spite of the efforts of the authorities to trace him. Now she wished to marry Cecil Innes, an artist, who determined to find proof of Sir William Nobell's death; but he soon found his own inexperience unequal to the task.

## THE TORRINGTON SQUARE MYSTERY

By M. L. EADES. Author of *The Tawny Desert*.

Clare Ashleigh, tired and lonely, returned to her flat one evening to find it already occupied by a strange and very presentable young man, who had apparently mistaken the address. On his departure she found, hidden behind a screen in her bedroom, the body of a man.

## THE MYSTERY AT GREYSTONES

By KATHLEEN LINDSAY. Author of *It Happened at the Cape*.

Sir Charles Randolph, a brilliant airman, had but one mission in life—to avenge the death of his brother, who had been in the Secret Service. With this end in view, he set off for South Africa, and at once became entangled in a series of strange happenings that eventually lead up to an amazing and thrilling climax.

## THE CREMONA HOTEL MYSTERY

By GRET LANE. Author of *The Lantern House Affair*.

In this exciting story we again meet some old friends in Inspector Barrin, now retired from Scotland Yard, and the young married couple, Kate and Tony Marsh, not to mention Blaster Murphy, the parrot, and Cocoa, the Peke-and-mixture dog. A distinctly thrilling yarn, with many amusing touches.

## A TRAITOR UNMASKED

By G. DAVISON. Author of *The Prince of Spies*.

A good yarn, packed with thrills, telling how the "man with the twisted face" came by his deformity. The author again introduces Cambridge as a background to his story, as well as exciting events in Bulkrania. This is a high-speed mystery yarn that cannot fail to thrill the reader.

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# HERBERT JENKINS' NEW 7/6 NOVELS

## JILL IN THE BOX

By JOHN GLYDER. Author of *Woman Friday*.

Mr. Glyder knows no master in the art of writing farcical stories, and in this uproarious yarn he returns to the style of "The Compulsory Honeymoon." The characterisation and back-chat are superb, while the swiftly moving plot keeps the fun at high pressure throughout.

## THE NOMAD BREED

By ISABEL THORNE.

This novel describes how little Jennie Fordyce ran away from the "ring," and her adventures in the outside world. It is a fine tale, embodying all the love and hate, the comedy and drama, that go to make up the glamorous world of the circus.

## THE HAUNTED FARM

By LOIS AUSTEN LEIGH. Author of *The Incredible Crime*.

Reviewing Miss Austen Leigh's former book, a critic remarked "passages of unusual beauty constantly recur." This will be found to be true of "The Haunted Farm," in which the author harks back with great success to the scene of her earlier book. She has produced an extremely powerful mystery yarn.

## THE MALTA MYSTERY

By SID G. HEDGES. Author of *The Channel Tunnel Mystery*.

Debono, the one-eyed monk, discovered that there was something amiss within the Chapel Bombardieri at Malta. Investigation revealed that some gold vessels had been looted, whilst the body of a famous financier was discovered nearby with a dagger in the back.

## THE BLOOMSBURY TREASURE

By SEFTON KYLE. Author of *The Vengeance of Mrs. Danvers*.

Packed in cases labelled "Motor Boat Parts," in order to allay suspicion, the famous Bloomsbury treasure was stowed aboard the s.s. *Hildegonda*, lying off London Bridge. Under cover of night the ship slipped from her moorings—and suddenly vanished. A thrilling and baffling yarn.

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# HERBERT JENKINS' NEW 7/6 NOVELS

## THE VENGEANCE OF MRS. DANVERS

BY SEFTON KYLE.

Henry Shrager was found murdered in a hired car with a knife in his throat. His friend, John Eddis, was condemned to death for the crime, but on the way to the prison the police car was attacked and the prisoner escaped. Then begins one of the most exciting and bizarre tales of revenge ever written.

## WRACK

BY CECIL GREY.

Poor Leo Martin was the son of a drunken fishwife and an unknown father, living in a sordid and brutal atmosphere. Yet such were his handsome features and graceful movements that he could not pass unnoticed in a crowd, and this story tells of his rise in the world and eventual, though hard won, happiness.

## THE PERFECT CRIMINAL

BY GORDON FURNIVAL. Author of *The Tracker Tracked*.

Some wonderful jewellery had been stolen from Dabbington Hall, and the total absence of clues pointed to its being the work of the man known as "the perfect criminal". This tale gives the reader an interesting glimpse into the mind and life of a criminal.

## WHITE IN THE MOON

BY MUSGROVE STRANGE.

This book forms a page from life that will not readily be forgotten. It is the story of a young man who resigned his job in his father's office and set out to see the world, becoming in turn a pierrot, a librarian, and an advertising agent in New York, his experiences making a powerful and well-told yarn.

## LEAH'S LOVER

BY JOSEPH GEE. Author of *Isaacs*.

In this novel the author paints an amazing picture of the racial characteristics and ideals of the Jews. The Rubinsteins and Leah especially, are portrayed with understanding and skill, and it is a remarkable yarn that will surely please all thinking persons, even though they may not entirely agree with all that it has to offer.

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# HERBERT JENKINS' NEW 7/6 NOVELS

## THE BORGIA CABINET

By J. S. FLETCHER. Author of *The South Foreland Murder*.

When Detective-Sergeant Charlesworth was sent down to Aldersyke Manor to investigate the sudden and mysterious death of Sir Charles Stanmore, he was confronted by an apparently impenetrable mystery. One of Mr. Fletcher's most ingenious yarns.

## THE CHANNEL TUNNEL MYSTERY

By SID G. HEDGES. Author of *The Weir Boyd Mystery*.

Norman Barrand, owner of *The Saturday Argus*, was a great believer in the channel tunnel scheme, and stunted it in his paper, with beneficial results. Then one day his car was found smashed to bits at the foot of the cliffs, with no trace of the owner.

## EGFRID THE HOSTAGE

By CHARLES TOWERS.

A remarkable historical romance set in England in the seventh century. Mr. Towers tells of the struggle of Christianity for supremacy, of the turbulent and warlike nature of the country, and around certain historical facts has woven a tale that is an example of masterful handling of a difficult subject.

## CROOKERY INN

By MAUDE CROSSLEY. Author of *The Crimson Feather*.

Tall and gaunt, a relic of Elizabethan days, Crookery Inn reared its sinister head above the trees of the surrounding forest. To Guy Bannister, sheltering there one evening from a storm, came strange premonitions of evil, weird happenings, shrieks in the night, and murder.

## THE LANTERN HOUSE AFFAIR

By GRET LANE. Author of *The Curlew Coombe Mystery*.

Kate and Tony Marsh went to Porth Morne ostensibly for a fishing holiday, but if half of what they had heard was true there were evil doings afoot in Lantern House, perched high on the cliffs. An excellent story in which thrills and excitement abound.

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# HERBERT JENKINS' LATEST 3/6 NOVELS

## THE ADVOCATE'S WIG

By LAUCHLAN MACLEAN WATT

A good detective story with many surprises, that introduces some really clever deduction and thrills, and it provides the reader with a plot that is both entertaining and mystifying.

## THE FAKIR'S CURSE By KENNEDY BRUCE

An arresting and gripping yarn of the white man in India. The lonely Indian station is vividly depicted, and the story rises to the heights of tragedy.

## FAIR EXCHANGE By EDMUND COLLES

While Sir Charles Castleton was staying on the Riviera he received a mysterious communication, which led to many thrills. The gang warfare is described with exciting detail, and there is a thrilling climax.

## THE SHADOW OF LAROSE

By ARTHUR GASK

This story shows us a murderer, his mind and how it works, the constant uncertainty of his position, and the deadly fear of detection. The wonderful Australian detective once again outwits his enemies after many exciting episodes.

## THE ETERNAL MASCULINE

By HECTOR HAWTON

A clever novel which has Fleet Street for its picturesque setting, and introduces us to the many types of journalists who throng the street of ink.

## THE INCREDIBLE CRIME

By L. AUSTEN LEIGH

A particularly loathsome drug was being distributed in Britain, and the police had their work cut out to trace it to its source. Cambridge was regarded as a centre of activity, and the story depicts graphically the life in the University town as well as the schemes of the evil-doers.

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# HERBERT JENKINS' LATEST 3/6 NOVELS

## PAINTED BUTTERFLIES

By MRS. PATRICK MACGILL

Mrs. Macgill has an inborn gift for holding her readers in a state of suspense and excitement, whilst her characters are the shrewdly drawn puppets of a master-hand.

## A LONESOME ROAD

By FRANCES MOCATTA

A powerful novel, dealing with the problem of heredity versus environment, that evinces a keen insight into human nature.

## MAN! WHERE AM I?

By NINA OLDFIELD

A charming light romance telling how Daphne Barrington was left an orphan on £100 a year, and embarked on a theatrical career. The author describes the profession with the lucidity born of experience.

## THE DEPUTY FOR CAIN

By ROY VICKERS

Ronald Orme comes into the room just as his best friend has murdered a blackmailer. They escape, but Ronald himself becomes entangled in the crime, and then suddenly the friend is killed in a street accident, and Ronald assumes the role of deputy-murderer.

## KOM BINNE

By VICTOR SAMPSON

In this fine book, breathing the sweet, clean air of the South African veldt, the author paints a splendid picture of farm life, successfully revealing the tremendous fascination of the great open spaces.

## WITHIN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

By PATRICK LEYTON

The story of a collector who hires a young burglar, with a delightful sense of humour, to steal for him a valuable jade idol.

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